Marshall Memo 1036

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
May 13, 2024

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Some of the best teachers are the ones for whom school didn't work that well. Those educators, because of their experience and perspective, can support many students who also find school challenging."

Jennifer Orr in "The Danger of Being Too Compliant" in *Educational Leadership*, May 2024 (Vol. 81, #8, pp. 68-69)

"We've overprotected our kids in the real world while underprotecting them in the virtual one, leaving them too much to their own devices, literally and figuratively."

Tracy Dennis-Tiwary in "The Rise of Machines," a *New York Times* review of *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt, April 21, 2024

"Phone-free schools. That needs to happen by this September. That is the most powerful thing we can do. It's easy to do, it costs almost nothing, and it's totally bipartisan."

Jonathan Haidt in a *New York Times* interview with Benjamin Russell, April 21, 2024

"When people hear facts, they decide if they agree. But stories create landscapes. Facts invite intellectual responses. Personal narratives inspire vitality. Facts are about reliability. But when you hear a story, you ask, 'What does this mean?' We are adrift without facts. We're barren without stories."

Dan Rockwell in "The Genius of Listening to Stories," *Leadership Freak*, May 8, 2024

"Correct answers can mask confusion, just like incorrect answers can hide understanding."

Marilyn Burns (quoted in item #3)

"Laughing alone is not as meaningful as laughing together, which connects us in an often atomized world."

Doug Lemov (see item #1)

1. Doug Lemov on the Power of Reading Books Together in Class

In this *Education Next* article, Doug Lemov bemoans the fact that kids are reading fewer and fewer books outside of school, that in many ELA classrooms students are reading short passages rather than books, and that the books students do read in school are often chosen to be "appealing" and "accessible" rather than for their literary merit.

Some educators believe that the content of what students read is not important – that reading instruction should focus on developing skills that will transfer to other passages and standardized tests. Not true, says Lemov, pointing to studies showing that learning discrete reading skills (e.g., main idea, inferencing) does not transfer across subject-matter domains or to high-stakes tests. As Daniel Willingham says, "Practice brings no benefit to reading comprehension strategy use." Rather, a skill like drawing inferences is largely a product of background knowledge, which allows students to fill in the gaps an author leaves in a passage and connect implicitly related ideas.

But the context-agnostic approach to reading instruction has persuaded many educators, leading to the use of short passages focused on specific reading strategies. Lemov recently observed a class where students read a few paragraphs about a recent immigrant from Ukraine and spent 40 minutes identifying supporting details for the main idea. Many students' answers missed the mark because they knew almost nothing about Ukraine.

When students do read books in class, says Lemov, they are often given a choice based on their interests. "One of the roles of a teacher," he asserts, "is to introduce students to books that are beyond their current knowledge and interest – and that just might surprise them." He acknowledges that when he was in seventh grade, if he'd been given a choice about what to read, he would have ended up with a sports biography. His English teacher made him read Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and he doubted he'd like it – but soon found "something much more substantial than I had previously believed."

Allowing students to choose their own books has another disadvantage, says Lemov: it takes away the power of a class reading the same book together. "When a book is shared with others," he says, "it adds the value of perspective beyond the student's individual reading experience. In discussion with others, students hear and wrestle with different interpretations and reactions, and they grow intellectually. They also grow emotionally, because by reading together, they are connected by a common experience."

Lemov quotes Marshall McLuhan's often-quoted observation, *The medium is the message*. What is the "message" of social media? That we can understand the world and others' reactions to it in simple statements of 280 characters, amped up by strong emotions and

tribal loyalties. The "message" of books, on the other hand, is that the world is complex and requires concentration and careful thought to grasp what's going on. "First impressions often turn out to be wrong, " says Lemov. "The truth is nuanced and often not simple. A protagonist never understands fully at the start; a book always involves a change in thinking about the world."

Works of fiction also take advantage of the cognitive power of stories, which research says supports remembering by connecting facts and characters in a coherent narrative. Stories are hard-wired in the human experience going back to pre-history. "We are especially receptive to the ideas we encounter in this intuitive form," says Lemov, and stories build empathy – our "ability and desire to understand what other people think and feel. The longer and deeper the story, the greater the benefits."

Lemov believes there are three more benefits to a class reading a book together. First, understanding the narrator's "voice" – Trustworthy? Pompous? Subtly ironic? Second, putting students in touch with important societal ideas and core knowledge – for example, knowing what a mention of Big Brother is all about. "The world is full of these allusions and references," says Lemov, "and so, because we want students to become full participants in societal discourse, it is a gift to help them acquire shared knowledge."

Third, understanding the archaic syntax and vocabulary of classic books is often a struggle, requiring students to read a passage two or three times – and that's a good thing. "If students never read text that is more than fifty or a hundred years old," says Lemov, "the writing of the past will slip farther and farther away from them. Do we want a society where students lack familiarity with such writing and the mindset to persist at the challenges it presents? I can't imagine it will be a good thing when only a small number of experts can extract meaning from *On the Origin of Species* or the U.S. Constitution."

Lemov believes there is one situation where short passages are helpful: when students are reading a work of fiction that is replete with new information – for example, a novel about World War II with references to rationing and victory gardens. With that book, short nonfiction passages explaining unfamiliar terms and information are okay, making the novel more accessible – and building students' background knowledge.

"Stories gain even more power when they are brought to life by reading aloud," says Lemov. There's the research-proven ability to boost comprehension and also the way hearing and reading together builds community, sharing the emotional and intellectual experience. Students notice how classmates respond as they hear the book being read. "Why would one look around at others' reactions while sharing a story?" Lemov asks. "One reason is that the laughter is not meaningful if others don't share the experience. Laughing alone is not as meaningful as laughing together, which connects us in an often atomized world."

"If the book is going to survive its death struggle with the isolating and disconnecting technology of the smartphone," Lemov concludes, "its best bet, I argue, will be if we can encourage students to read books with each other, laughing and gasping together, and in so doing create meaningful and connected experiences that they hope to recreate by reading more and further. Books are the ideal vehicle to both inform us and link us together. It's time we

brought them back into the classroom and made the shared experience of them the centerpiece of literacy instruction."

"Why Are Books Disappearing from English and Reading Classrooms?" by Doug Lemov in *Education Next*, April 3, 2024

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2. How Have Horace Mann's Reform Ideas Fared Over the Years?

In this *Educational Forum* article, David Cohen (University of Michigan and Harvard University) and Simona Goldin (University of North Carolina/Chapel Hill) assess the track record of the ambitious vision for U.S. schools advocated by Horace Mann and his allies in the 1830s and 1840s: That teachers should treat children as active learners, that teaching should be intellectually engaging, that teachers should respect students' thinking, and that schools should cultivate thoughtful work.

These ideals have encountered stiff resistance over the years, say Cohen and Goldin, and continue to swim against powerful currents today. Why have so many classrooms focused on memorization and recitation? The authors have five explanations:

- The "rocketing growth of enrollments" in public elementary schools in the 1800s and 1900s meant that schools were playing catch-up with population surges and focused on building schools, training and hiring teachers, and funding materials.
- Teachers tend to teach as they were taught, and over the years, their experience has largely been with pedantic instruction.
- It's very challenging to implement the reform ideas; it requires deep knowledge of pedagogy and students as well as day-to-day flexibility.
- There hasn't been the infrastructure for teachers to learn reform pedagogy well enough to make it succeed in classrooms.
- There were no detailed plans and programs for implementing the reforms in teaching and learning and no opportunities to master them.

In short, Horace Mann's ideas were countercultural and inconsistent with what many Americans thought of as "real school." That reality, say Cohen and Goldin, "was amplified by the political design of public school governance, for schools were popularly and locally governed, and thus quite vulnerable to what their publics knew, believed, and were willing to support."

The ideals of the early reformers have not completely failed, say the authors, and point to three pathways of success. First has been the "slow and partial diffusion of reform ideas and practices" in some schools and classrooms – hybrid implementation. Second, some innovative public school districts have adopted the ideas for a period of time. And third, some nonpublic schools defined their mission in terms of Mann's goals and have strived to keep them alive.

"Our hunger for ambitious learning and teaching have endured," conclude Cohen and Goldin, "echoing across the work of educational philosophers, reformers, and practitioners. We see, here, that those ambitious goals can only be met with similarly ambitious approaches…

The legacies we inherit here do not yield easy or convenient roadmaps for the realization of ambitious teaching and learning for the children of our nation."

"How Teachers Might Have Taught but Mostly Didn't, and Why" by David Cohen and Simona Goldin in *The Educational Forum*, April-June 2024 (Vol. 88, #2, pp. 234-252); Goldin can be reached at simonag@email.unc.edu.

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3. Less Math Grading, More Feedback and Thinking

In this *Edutopia* article, Texas math curriculum coordinator Dani Fry suggests how to make classroom math assessments less fraught and more productive:

• *Assign fewer practice problems and make them ungraded*. Some teachers give 10-20 problems to build students' stamina – and so that if students gets one or two wrong, they can still get a good grade. Giving fewer, high-quality questions allows students to slow down and think more carefully, and making them ungraded keeps parents from getting into the game in an unproductive way. Stamina can be built as students focus more deeply on a few well-constructed problems.

• *De-emphasize right answers*. "When students see that they're only getting credit if an answer is correct, the answer is all they value, and their parents will follow suit," says Fry. "To be a future-ready learner and a critical thinker, students must communicate and think carefully about the content they're learning. They must learn how to get the thoughts swirling in their mind onto paper so that when a problem is too difficult, they know how to process it thoroughly."

• *Avoid multiple-choice questions*. Choosing from several answer options requires less thinking, and responses don't allow the teacher to know if a student guessed and got lucky or used good reasoning. Fry quotes Marilyn Burns: "Correct answers can mask confusion, just like incorrect answers can hide understanding."

• *Anticipate misconceptions and scaffold appropriately*. In the upper grades, Fry suggests giving students a checklist of the expected behaviors. In the lower grades, give labeled boxes or graphic clues to guide the problem-solving process. Students can get feedback on each part of the checklist, which communicates the importance of the process as well as the correct answer.

• *Use a mix of questions from recent and spiraled essential standards*. "When students know what concept an entire assignment is about," says Fry, "they don't have to productively struggle as much."

• *Use graded work to inform instruction*. For work on which students will receive grades, it's still possible to get instructional value for targeted mini-lessons and follow-up work with small groups. Seeing graded work this way might also mean less need for daily exit tickets, cutting down on the teacher's grading time.

"These slight adjustments to make student work more open-ended have countless benefits," Fry concludes. "Students will become more independent and targeted in their thinking, helping teachers to know them better as learners and grow them as mathematicians."

"A More-Efficient and Productive Way to Conduct Math Assessments" by Dani Fry in *Edutopia*, April 2, 2024

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4. Teaching in the Era of ChatGPT

In this online article, Leon Furze says that teachers' attempts to detect students cheating via artificial intelligence (AI) tools have been largely ineffective. What's the alternative? Furze suggests a five-level scale, from Level 1 with no AI use to Level 5 with full use of AI, and proposes these strategies, each with benefits and drawbacks:

• *Use Level 5 assessments* – At this level, teachers actively encourage students to experiment with generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools like ChatGPT. "When students leave the educational bubble," says Furze, "they'll be free to use whatever tools are available to them." This gives them practice, with monitoring and accountability, using any applications suitable to the task – text, image, audio, video, 3D, and generating code. Drawbacks include ethical concerns (copyright and intellectual property) and equity of access to GenAI apps.

• *Expecting AI use and teaching the skills* – It's realistic to assume that most students will be using AI tools, so it's smart to teach them how to use them for ideation, editing, and appropriate portions of class assignments. Since everything is in the open, this eliminates the need to use detection tools, and teachers can address students' concerns and knowledge gaps. Drawbacks include the time, resources, and cost required for educators to get up to speed on the technology, as well as the need to update and reframe current assessment tasks.

• *Ungrading* – "If we shift the focus of education away from the final assessment and towards what is being taught (and why)," says Furze, "then the imperative for academic misconduct may be lessened" and students may focus more on deeper understanding and genuine learning. Grades keep students focused on GPAs and transcripts versus growth and improvement, says Emily Pitts Donahoe. De-emphasizing grades reduces stress and pressure and allows for imaginative use of GenAI without worrying about the impact on final grades. Drawbacks include going against the grain of many schools' assessment practices and the notion that ungrading won't work in "real world" subjects.

• *Knowing students' style and voice* – Whether through high-tech tools ("stylometry") or just plain "knowing your students," this is what some teachers are doing to guard against inappropriate use of GenAI tools. The advantages include building relationships with students and understanding and appreciating their perspectives and ways of expressing themselves – and strong relationships can help prevent academic misconduct. Drawbacks include whether this can be scaled beyond small classes and whether it really stops the most sophisticated forms of cheating – there are tools that can emulate a student's style.

• *Redefining cheating* – This strategy, says Furze, raises the fundamental question: how do we assure that learning has happened? It potentially "allows us to approach academic integrity from a more-constructive standpoint, emphasizing the importance of genuine learning over the moralistic labelling of certain behaviors. By moving away from punitive measures and

instead designing assessments that truly demonstrate learning, we can create a system that encourages students to engage with their education meaningfully, rather than seeing it as a series of hoops to jump through." Redefining cheating also "demonstrates to students that we value trust and transparency and places the expectation on them to do the right thing." And it has the additional advantage of reducing educators' workload.

Drawbacks include going against "huge systemic and cultural barriers, not least the perception within and outside of education that shifting the goalposts on academic integrity is 'soft' and a copout." Plus, it's easier said than done.

• *In-person, in-time, in-place assessments* – "There are plenty of methods that predate GenAI by a few centuries," says Furze, "and still work." This doesn't mean examination-style assessments; it includes group work, orals, seminars, simulations, brainstorming with sticky notes, debates, marker pens on butcher paper, and more. Advantages include that these assessments are easy to monitor and secure, since students don't have access to devices and can be relevant, engaging, and authentic. Drawbacks are that this kind of assessment is difficult to scale for large classes, and there's no online option.

"Ditch the Detectors: Six Ways to Rethink Assessment for Generative Artificial Intelligence"
by Leon Furze, May 3, 2024

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5. Elementary Scheduling for Equitable Service Delivery

(Originally titled "Designing Strategic Elementary Schedules")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, David James (New Solutions K12) says the challenge of elementary scheduling is making sure all students get the services to which they're entitled. Many principals block out lunch, recess, and specials and then let homeroom teachers decide when to teach ELA, math, and other subjects. Teachers appreciate autonomy and flexibility, but the literacy block almost always ends up taking place first thing in the morning, and that affects service delivery.

Why? Because, says James, reading specialists and other support staff have to dash from room to room during the morning literacy block to see the students in their caseload, usually working with only one or two at a time. In addition, some students are pulled from Tier 1 literacy instruction, which is not ideal.

A better approach, says James, is for the leadership team to create a schoolwide schedule following these steps: (a) blocking out lunch, recess, and specials; (b) deciding when literacy, math, and intervention blocks will happen for each homeroom; and (c) scheduling science, social studies, and other subjects. Staggering the scheduling of literacy blocks (usually with lower grades in the morning, upper grades later in the day) has several important advantages:

- Reading specialists can converge on one grade at a time, which allows them to spend 75 percent of their day directly supporting students.
- This means they can work with twice as many students as in a literacy-first schedule.
- Special education and support staff can work with students outside Tier 1 literacy time.

- Students with special needs get support throughout the day.
- Core instruction is interrupted for very few students, if any.

In periods when pullouts and push-ins are occurring (sometimes called the WIN or What I Need block), students who don't require academic support can engage in a set of enrichment centers based on their interests.

Working with elementary schools around the U.S., James has seen wide variation in time allocations within 90-minute literacy blocks and 60-minute math blocks. He's concerned that this can result in inequitable delivery of key components and less-efficient use of support teachers. James believes districts should convene a committee to decide on "micro-schedules" for the literacy block, with the same time allocations and sequence for phonics and other components.

"Designing Strategic Elementary Schedules" by David James in *Educational Leadership*, May 2024 (Vol. 81, #8, online only); James is co-author, with Nathan Levenson, of *It's Time for Strategic Scheduling* (ASCD, 2023); see Memo 998 for their article on secondary school scheduling; James can be reached at djames@newsolutionsk12.com.

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6. Planning a Literature-Based Unit on Mental Health Issues

In this *Middle School Journal* article, Brooke Eisenbach and Jason Frydman (Lesley University) say mental health conditions afflict 20 percent of young people today. Experts believe the surge has been caused by the pandemic, racial tensions, and the negative effects of social media. "While teachers are not trained or expected to act in the role of counselor or therapist," say Eisenbach and Frydman, "many of us have a desire to do our part in furthering the conversation on mental health, and in turn, break the stigma that often surrounds mental illness."

One strategy is a schoolwide book study. A school in Oceanside, New York chose *The Science of Broken Things* by Tae Keller and had students and families purchase the book and read it together at home. The school then launched read-alouds and discussions with nearly every department taking part over several weeks, culminating in a visit by the author. The school's social support staff reported a greater sense of confidence and openness about mental health issues among students and adults. Subsequently a number of students took advantage of the school's confidential reporting system to share their own or peers' mental health concerns.

Baltimore, Maryland organized a discussion of *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds among 85 middle schools. More than 1,400 students took part, with teachers integrating the novel into existing lessons over a period of four months, followed by community events and a visit by the author. The majority of students said the experience had a positive effect on their thinking about mental health, and most said they wanted similar discussions in the future.

Eisenbach and Frydman worked with a group of middle-school educators to plan a curriculum unit using carefully chosen young adult literature to explore mental health issues. They started by defining four essential pillars of knowledge and action:

- Understanding how to attain and maintain positive mental health;
- Understanding various mental health disorders and their treatments;
- Decreasing the stigma associated with mental disorders;
- Enhancing knowledge of help-seeking behaviors and supports.

The authors then engaged teachers in self-exploration and training with their schools' counseling and support staff, discussing teachers' beliefs and experiences with mental health issues, their prior knowledge, misconceptions, and stereotypes, choosing suitable books, and planning the curriculum. Here is a curated list of books that might be appropriate for such a unit, along with the specific issues each one addresses:

- *What About Will* by Ellen Hopkins – grief, opioid use disorder, depression
- *The Magical Imperfect* by Chris Baron – selective mutism, grief, isolation
- *OCDaniel* by Wesley King – obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety, bipolar disorder, depression, suicide
- *Starfish* by Lisa Fipps – disordered eating, therapy, anxiety
- *Guts* by Raina Telgemeier – anxiety, phobias, self-care, therapy
- *A Work in Progress* by Jarrett Lerner – disordered eating, body image, isolation, bullying, therapy
- *The Year We Fell from Space* – depression, isolation, therapy
- *Stuntboy, in the Meantime* by Jason Reynolds – anxiety, bullying
- *Everywhere Blue* by Joanne Rossmassler Fritz – substance abuse disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, anxiety
- *Good Enough, A Novel* by Jen Petro-Roy – disordered eating, anorexia, addiction, therapy, treatment

Eisenbach and Frydman emphasize the importance of teachers working closely with their schools' counseling and support staff in planning and implementing such a unit, including lessons when mental health professionals should be in the classroom, and follow-up services for students for whom discussions might raise the need for counseling and support.

"Integrating Mental Health Literacy in the English Language Arts Middle-School Classroom" by Brooke Eisenbach and Jason Frydman in *Middle School Journal*, May 2024 (Vol. 55, #3, pp. 5-15); Eisenbach is at beisenba@lesley.edu, Frydman at jfrydman@lesley.edu.

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7. Recommended Middle-Grade Books About Periods

In this *School Library Journal* article, Amanda MacGregor reports that menstruation was a taboo topic in middle grade and young adult literature until Louise Fitzhugh's 1965 *The Long Secret* and Judy Bloom's 1970 *Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret*. After these groundbreaking books, there was another long silence on the topic, but now there are a number of age-appropriate titles. (According to the National Institutes of Health, the average age of menarche is 12.4 (sixth grade), with 10-16 (third grade to high school) the normal range.)

"Focusing on a range of experiences and emotions," says MacGregor, "authors are destigmatizing menstruation with stories that remove silence, shame, and secrecy and offer a new way to talk about periods, one full of dignity and honesty." Whether information comes from family members, educators, books, or online, it's important that periods are discussed and understood long before they're experienced. Here are MacGregor's recommended recent books for the upper-elementary and secondary grades:

- *The Moon Within* by Aida Salazar (2019)
- *Grow Up, Tahlia Wilkins!* by Karina Evans (2022)
- *Calling the Moon: 16 Period Stories from BIPOC Authors*, edited by Aida Salazar and Yamile Saied Méndez (2023)
- *Code Red* by Joy McCullough (2023)
- *Free Period* by Ali Terese (2024)
- *Lo Simpson Starts a Revolution* by Melanie Florence (2024)
- *Mani Semilla Finds Her Quetzal Voice* by Anna Lapera (2024)
- *Ollie in Between* by Jess Callans (forthcoming in 2025)
- *The Beautiful Game* by Yamile Saied Méndez (forthcoming in 2025)

"Let's Talk Periods: Middle-Grade Books About Menstruation Center Dignity and Equity" by Amanda MacGregor in *School Library Journal*, May 2024 (Vol. 70, #5, pp. 34-37); see Memo 879 for an earlier list of recommended books on this topic.

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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 54 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 HTMI 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 SmartBrief
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
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 Ed (formerly Ed. Magazine)
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)
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
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