Marshall Memo 1069

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
January 6, 2025

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"One of the chief complaints that I often hear from students is that adults don't listen to them."
Syreeta Carrington (see item #1)

"Giving kids agency doesn't mean letting them do whatever they want. It doesn't mean lowering expectations, turning education into entertainment, or allowing children to choose their own adventure."
Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop (see item #2)

"Helping students build information literacy skills aligns with a core function of school, which is teaching them how to be autonomous, ethical adults."
Eric Hudson (see item #3)

"Having students working independently or collaboratively for extended periods of time allows us to see what our students are capable of and allows us to intervene if they're off track."
Wendy Lang (see item #4)

"Let kids do for themselves what they can already do, guide them and encourage them to do things they can almost do. and then teach and model for them the things that they can't do."
Aliza Pressman (quoted in item #2)

"It went well."
A typical comment by school leaders evaluating PD (see item #6)

"When a thing is funny, search it carefully for a hidden truth."
George Bernard Shaw

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1. Restorative Justice in Action in a New Jersey Middle School

In this *NJEA Review* article, Syreeta Carrington describes a conflict she was asked to handle as her middle school's restorative justice coordinator. One group of seventh-grade boys said another group of boys had called them "hoodlums" and "thugs" outside of school. The incident was especially tricky because the boys in the group doing the name-calling were white, Latin, and Asian and the recipients of the slurs were mostly African-American and Latin.

Both groups requested a restorative justice intervention. As they gathered in a school meeting room, there was a suggestion from each side that two other students should participate, and everyone waited until they arrived. Carrington, joined by a colleague, thanked the boys for being willing to engage in a "sitting circle" rather than escalating the conflict. "Since no one was especially eager to go first," she says, "I shared with them the information that had been shared with me and invited them to correct anything that I'd gotten wrong. That seemed to get them talking."

It turned out there was some overlap between the two friendship groups, and there was a request to bring in one more boy who they especially wanted to be there. As time was running out on this 40-minute session, Carrington asked if they were willing to come back the following week, with the understanding that they would recruit this additional student, and everyone agreed. "Because this is middle school and things move at the speed of light," she says, "by the time I got the opportunity to speak to the student, he'd already heard about the restorative justice session and expressed his desire to participate."

Altogether, eleven boys reconvened for a series of five meetings over a month, and the full details of the conflict emerged. At first the conversation focused on race and language, but additional dynamics emerged. The first group had been excluded by the second from an after-school football game, but one boy was allowed to play. Boys in both groups had been subjected to racist language, and it became clear that they were all hurting from a breakdown of relationships.

As the sessions proceeded, there were unvarnished discussions about race, friendship, the intersection of race, sports, and economics, and more. "We engaged in some difficult and uncomfortable conversations," says Carrington, "but they leaned into the work" and she and her colleague were proud of them. In the final meeting, the boys broke into small groups and competed to see which could build the tallest freestanding marshmallow and spaghetti tower. Then they got back together in a circle for some final thoughts and observations. Among them:

- *I am glad that we had this time together. It made me feel better.*

- *It taught me about words and how we need to think about them. It's possible that the words we use not only hurt us and others but can also hurt people who are in our families and are part of various communities.*
- *I'm glad that we did this.*

Carrington says there have been other incidents involving racism at her school, also antisemitism and homophobia. "It is not enough to simply admonish the behavior and hope it doesn't occur again," she says. "We have to have the courage to have hard conversations with our students. They are already trying to figure it out to varying degrees of success within their social circles… We cannot afford to forsake genuine, face-to-face conversations that have the power to connect and heal us."

Carrington realizes that not everyone is willing to engage in the kind of process she described, either because of discomfort discussing fraught topics or the time commitment or training involved. But she doesn't believe educators necessarily need to be schooled in restorative justice to engage in challenging conversations with students. When she was a social studies teacher, she knew that when students were "buzzing" about something, it was impossible to teach effectively and she needed to address what was happening. She suggests a few basics for teachers in similar situations:

- Acknowledging the need to pause, perhaps saying, *Let's take 15 minutes to talk about what everyone is buzzing about, and then we'll proceed with the lesson.*
- Setting guidelines such as raising a hand to be acknowledged;
- Truncating the conversation if it appears that the issue can't be resolved right then;
- Offering another time, perhaps during recess or after school, to continue.

"Students will be grateful," says Carrington. "One of the chief complaints that I often hear from students is that adults don't listen to them."

She has two other recommendations for teachers who haven't been trained in restorative justice and are in schools without those protocols:

• If you hear something offensive, address it. "If a student says something, whether it is yelled in the hallway or in a classroom, don't pretend not to have heard it," says Carrington. "Your inaction signals to the other students… that you will do nothing about comments that they've probably been exposed to before." In a hallway, you can calmly pull the student aside and ask if you heard them correctly." *Did I just hear you say…?* or *What did you mean by…?* In a classroom, you can say, *Stop it. That language will not be tolerated in this classroom.* "Students are looking to the adults to do something," says Carrington. "They take their cues from us."

• Don't hesitate to consult with colleagues and tap their strengths. If you're not comfortable with a particular subject, she says, "you can tell the students that you are not prepared to have this conversation at this time, but you would like to revisit it soon." That might happen with a few students after class, or after checking in with a colleague who has more experience or a greater comfort level with the topic. "The goal is to meet the need," Carrington says. "If you're not best able to meet the need, endeavor to find someone who is."

"Let's Not Fear Having Courageous Conversations" by Syreeta Carrington in *NJEA Review*, December 2024 (Vol. 98, #5, pp. 26-29); Carrington can be reached at scarrington@montclair.k12.nj.us.

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2. Building Agency and Initiative into Kids' Lives

In this *New York Times* article, researchers Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop report that many young adults "feel woefully unprepared for life in the work force." Employers agree, saying that new hires from GenZ "lack initiative, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and resilience." The reason? It's not just social media and the pandemic, say Anderson and Winthrop. It's also because parents and schools aren't building enough *agency* into childrearing and schooling.

"Giving kids agency doesn't mean letting them do whatever they want," say the authors. "It doesn't mean lowering expectations, turning education into entertainment, or allowing children to choose their own adventure." It involves orchestrating the development of three important life skills:

- Identifying and pursuing goals that are meaningful to young people;
- Building strategies and skills to reach those goals;
- Assessing progress and making course corrections.

The problem is that very few students have these experiences, which may be why the percent of kids who say they love school goes from 74 percent in third grade to only 26 percent in tenth grade.

Studies around the world show that building in goal-setting, strategy development, and self-monitoring has a significant positive impact on classroom engagement, grades, peer-to-peer comity, and happiness – often with significant effect sizes: 0.7 and 0.9. Some specific examples:

• At the start of a lesson on the solar system, instead of giving a step-by-step outline, the teacher asks students what they're curious about, what they're interested in and care about, and what they want to know.

• Instead of using controlling language – *You need to read this article by Friday* – taking a reasoning approach – *I'm assigning this article because I want you to understand how photosynthesis can be useful in trying to invent new climate change technology*. "Reasoning language lowers the shield," say Anderson and Winthrop. "Kids open up."

• Instead of saying, *Here is an example of a good essay. Please go write one*, a teacher says, *Here is an example of a good essay. What is your goal for your first draft?* and then monitors and coaches as students write.

• A Dallas, Texas elementary teacher has her students set learning goals in every class and reports that students chase her down in the hallway to report on their progress, proud of what they've accomplished.

• High-school students in the Big Picture Learning network decide on a topic they want to explore, identify an organization where they can learn about it, and spend one or two days a

week in internships learning by doing. Teachers regularly debrief with students on their goals, the strategies they're using, and what to do when they get stuck.

• Rather than ordering a resistant child to do homework, a parent says, *I know you hate doing homework. I felt that way too when I was a kid. But homework can make a big difference in helping you master a new skill. We could work for 15 minutes and then take a break, or would you rather take a break now and start in an hour?*

In the words of psychologist Aliza Pressman: "Let kids do for themselves what they can already do, guide them and encourage them to do things they can almost do. and then teach and model for them the things that they can't do."

"Giving Kids Autonomy Has Surprising Results" by Jenny Anderson and Rebecca Winthrop in *The New York Times*, January 4, 2025; their book on this subject is *The Disengaged Teen: Helping Kids Learn Better, Feel Better, and Live Better* (Crown, 2025)

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3. Using "Lateral" Reading to Fact-Check Generative AI

In this *Learning on Purpose* article, Eric Hudson says it's common knowledge that large language models like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude sometimes contain incorrect information and "hallucinate" – make stuff up. Generative artificial intelligence, says Hudson, gives us "quick responses, an authoritative tone, polished output, a user interface designed to give the appearance of 'typing' and 'thinking' [that] make us think the output is plausible when in reality the bot is trained to make it *sound* plausible."

What are the best ways to check GenAI for accuracy? Hudson recommends the approach that fact-checkers use with online searches: *lateral reading*. Rather than spending time scrutinizing the information, immediately leave that page and use the web to check the veracity of the *source*, the *claims* it makes, and what *you* know – or what you *think* you know – about the subject. Details on each:

• *The source* – What is its reputation? What have others said about it? Can it be trusted? The bots aren't authorities on a subject – they've just vacuumed up what's on the Internet and presented it in a plausible way. The key is seeing generative AI as an *assistant*, not an authority. Hudson suggests three strategies:

- Copy what the bot produced and paste it into Google, which can quickly show whether it's accurate.
- Paste the GenAI-generated information into AI research tools or databases to see if researchers have taken up the topic.
- Google the people cited to check their reputations.

"Each of these lateral reading moves takes just a minute," says Hudson, "yet they reveal context and insight that simply reading the output would never provide. They help me make decisions about how to assess the output and what my next move should be."

• *The claims* – What have others said about the claim? If it's a story, what's the larger story? If it's a statistic, what is the larger context? "Vertical reading and traditional critical

thinking still matter," says Hudson. "But online, vertical reading is not only ineffective, but also time-consuming and intense. Lateral reading should be fast and lightweight, a matter of opening several other sources and skimming to see how much and by whom the topic has been covered in other places."

Here's an example. Hudson asked Claude, *What were the causes of World War I?* The initial response was helpful, going beyond what he remembered from high school. But how reliable were the details? Here's how he followed up:

- He Googled a few of the names and terms and found they were repeated in Wikipedia and in museum, university, and library websites.
- He asked Claude to provide a list of resources to learn more and got titles and a few links, all of which checked out online.
- He Googled the names of the recommended resources and found they were cited by universities and museums.
- He asked Claude for search phrases that would help verify its claims and offer diverse and challenging perspectives, and it suggested more than a dozen, a few of which revealed new and useful information. Claude also pointed him to academic and library databases.
- Finally, Hudson copied Claude's initial response into ChatGPT and Gemini and asked for elaboration, challenges, new ideas, and additional resources. The other bots largely agreed with Claude but added detail and reframed some ideas.

"All this took about 10 minutes," says Hudson, "and by the time I was done I had several useful summaries and a list of legitimate resources to explore in more depth… Skills like lateral reading ensure that we are in control when we use generative AI… They are durable and transferable."

• *Your own knowledge* – "Part of learning how to read laterally is learning how to recognize and react to our own ignorance and biases," says Hudson. "Self-awareness and decision-making are essential to effective use of any technology, especially generative AI. Helping students build information literacy skills aligns with a core function of school, which is teaching them how to be autonomous, ethical adults."

He shares a flowchart from UNESCO on when it's safe to use ChatGPT (click the article link below to see this in graphic form):

- Does it matter if the output is true?
- If NO, it's safe to use.
- If YES, do you have expertise to verify that the output is accurate?
- If NO, it's unsafe to use.
- If YES, are you able and willing to take full responsibility (legal, moral, etc.) for inaccuracies that you miss?
- If NO, it's unsafe to use.
- If YES, it's possible to use, but be sure to verify each output word and sentence for accuracy and common sense.

Hudson's only concern about this flowchart is that "*expertise* is not just about what we already know, it's about how we find things out. Prior knowledge might not be sufficient to evaluate AI output." In other words, relying on our own intelligence and sense of what sounds plausible is not enough.

"AI Skills That Matter, Part 2: Lateral Reading" by Eric Hudson in *Learning on Purpose*, January 3, 2025

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4. The Key to Productive In-Class Work Periods

In this *Edutopia* article, teacher/author Wendy Lang has suggestions for maximizing the value of classroom time when students are doing an extended assignment. Kids might be completing a lab, involved in a project, or following up on a flipped classroom homework assignment. "Having students working independently or collaboratively for extended periods of time," she says, "allows us to see what our students are capable of and allows us to intervene if they're off track."

In the past, Lang found that in-class work periods weren't always productive. Some students said they couldn't concentrate with classmates around, some were overly reliant on parental help to do their best work, and some said they needed resources that weren't available in school (*my good markers*). To deal with these issues, Lang developed the following strategies:

- Tell students in advance what they'll need – a laptop, last night's homework, construction paper and scissors, etc.
- Set clear expectations for the task and tell how much time there will be.
- Don't give the whole period for work time; if the assignment is substantial, break it into several chunks spread through the week, interspersed with other activities.
- Kick off with a review of the task, including a recommended approach, steps to be taken, and a sense of when each should be completed.
- Check in throughout the work period, seeing where students are at various milestones.
- "I never sit down," says Lang. As she circulates, she sometimes gets the class's attention to re-explain a concept or clarify expectations.
- Students are asked to periodically check their progress with a partner or group. "As an English teacher," says Lang, "I'll use these stop points to help students refine their working thesis for an essay or test the argument they're making in a speech." There might also be an all-class discussion on effective strategies and useful resources.
- Process every work period when it ends – a quick discussion of what worked, what could be improved, kudos for progress and good work, a reminder on the goal, and plans going forward.

"8 Ways to Maximize Work Periods in Class" by Wendy Lang in *Edutopia*, December 2, 2024

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5. Checking on the Implementation of a New Curriculum Initiative

In this article in *The Learning Professional*, educators at Learning Forward say that when a new program is rolled out, "what happens in classrooms varies widely." They suggest that principals use these Levels of Use questions, drawn from the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM):

- Are you using the curriculum, innovation, or another change strategy?
- If not, do you plan to use it and have you set a start date? Are you currently looking for information about it?
- If you are using it, are you making any change to it, and if so, what kind?
- Are you coordinating your use of the innovation with colleagues or other users internal or external to our system?
- Are you planning or exploring major modifications?

Teachers' responses can be used to place them on this continuum of implementation (each with a characteristic statement), and decide on next steps:

- Nonuse – *I've heard about it but honestly, I have too many other things to do now.*
- Orientation – *I'm looking at the materials and am considering using it sometime in the future.*
- Preparation – *I've attended professional learning, and I've set aside time every week for studying the materials.*
- Mechanical – *Most of my time is spent organizing materials and keeping things going as smoothly as possible every day.*
- Routine – *This year, it has worked out beautifully. I'm sure there will be a few changes next year, but basically I will use it the same way I did this year.*
- Refinement – *I recently developed a more-detailed assessment instrument to gain more-specific information from students to see where I need to change my use of the innovation.*
- Integration – *Not everyone has all the skills needed to use the program to have the greatest impact on student learning. I've been working with another teacher for two years, and recently a third teacher began working with us.*
- Renewal – *I am still interested in the program and using it with modifications. Frankly, I'm reading, talking, and even doing a little research to see whether some other approach might be better for the students.*

"How Well Is Change Progressing in Your School or System?" by Learning Forward in *The Learning Professional*, December 2024 (Vol. 45, #6, pp. 54-57)

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6. Getting Meaningful Feedback After PD Sessions

In this article in *The Learning Professional*, Jo Lein and Jennifer Gripado (Tulsa Public Schools) say that school leaders' off-the-cuff evaluation of many professional development sessions is, "It went well." To get specific information on whether PD experiences were

relevant, helpful, and worth the time invested, Tulsa developed this survey of participants, with responses given on a six-point Likert scale:

- Relevance – The session supported my development in my current or future role.
- Connection and voice – The session allowed me to connect with my colleagues and share my voice.
- Facilitation – The session was facilitated well.
- Promotion – I would recommend this session to other people in similar roles.
- Time prioritization – This session was worth my time away from my other duties.
- Application – I anticipate being able to apply what I learned to support my school's goals.

The last item "illuminates whether participants feel empowered and motivated to make tangible changes in their teaching methods that should lead to student outcomes," say Lein and Gripado. "It is not as conclusive as evaluating changes in practice directly, but it can help to determine whether the logic model of the learning experience is supported or, if not, where the chain of effect breaks down."

Why a six-point response scale? Lein and Gripado believe that commonly used 5- or 7-point scales give people "an easy out," allowing them to breeze through giving the middle rating and providing little useful feedback.

"6 Questions to Include in a Satisfaction Survey" by Jo Lein and Jennifer Gripado in *The Learning Professional*, December 2024 (Vol. 45, #6, pp. 50-52); Gripado can be reached at gripaje@tulsaschools.org.

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7. Recommended Comic Graphic Novels for the Elementary Grades

In this *School Library Journal* feature, Brigid Alverson suggests these children's books with witty dialogue and silly plots:

- *Detective Beans and the Case of the Missing Hat* by Li Chen, grade 1-4
- *Rocket and Groot: Tales of Terror* by Amanda Deibert, illustrated by Leo Trinidad, grade 2-3
- *Schnozzer and Tatertoes: Take a Hike!* and *Schnozzer and Tatertoes: Shoot the Moon!* by Rick Stromoski, grade 2-5
- *Sophie: Jurassic Bark* and *Sophie: Frankenstein's Hound* by Brian Anderson, grade 3-6
- *Barkham Asylum* by Yehudi Mercado, grade 3-7
- *Bunny vs. Monkey* by Jamie Smart, grade 3-7
- *The Unpetables* and *The Unpetables Book Two: Unpetable in the City* by Dennis Messner, grade 4-7
- *It's Jeff!* by Kelly Thompson, illustrated by Gurihiru, grade 4-7

"Critter Comfort" by Brigid Alverson in *School Library Journal*, January 2025 (Vol. 71, #1, pp. 32-35)

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8. Short Item:

An Infographic on How Couples Met – Check out the changing pattern from 1930 to 2024 in this animated graph.

"How Couples Meet and Stay Together" Michael Rosenfeld, Reuben Thomas, and Sonia Hausen in *Data Is Beautiful*, combined dataset, Stanford University Libraries, 2024

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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
Ed Magazine
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 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
Language Magazine
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