Marshall Memo 1076

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 24, 2025

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"It turns out that a reliable way of grabbing people's attention is to ping that deep need inside all of us, carried over from our helpless dependency on our caregivers in childhood: *Someone is paying attention to me!*"

Jennifer Szalai in "May We Have Our Attention Please?" a review of *The Sirens' Call* by Chris Hayes in *The New York Times Book Review*, February 16, 2025

"Different points of view are seen not as opportunities to learn but as provocations to attack."

Jennifer Szalai in "May We Have Our Attention Please?" a review of *Superbloom* by Nicholas Carr in *The New York Times Book Review*, February 16, 2025

"Having been in the field for close to 40 years, I can tell you that dyslexia is a lifelong neuro-developmental disability that affects how the brain processes language – it has no cure. The good news is, though, with early intervention and with the appropriate types of modifications and intervention, people with dyslexia thrive in today's world."

Ben Shifrin, Maryland school head, quoted in "What Educators Need to Know About Dyslexia – and Why It's Not Something to 'Fix'" by Elizabeth Heubeck in *Education Week*, February 13, 2025

"It's not a lifelong sentence, but it's a lifelong condition. You can compensate. You can improve. But it's like poor vision. I wear glasses. I will always wear glasses. My vision will never be perfect. I can compensate for it. But I will never win the battle with vision."

Molly Ness, Denver-based reading researcher and literacy specialist, quoted in *ibid*.

"Teens literally described feeling guilty for reading a book for pleasure."

Emily Weinstein (quoted in item #3)

1. A Tribute to Roberta Flack

Some memorable quotes from the legendary singer Roberta Flack, a former schoolteacher, who died on February 23rd at 88:

There's a river somewhere that flows through the lives of everyone.

Music comes first from my heart, and then goes upstairs to my head where I check it out.

I don't try to be a soul singer, a jazz singer, a blues singer – no category. My music is my expression of what I feel and believe in a moment.

So see every opportunity as golden, and keep our eyes on the prize – yours, not anybody else's.

To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.

Getting married is easy. Staying married is more difficult. Staying happily married for a lifetime is among the fine arts.

Remember: always walk in the light. And if you feel like you're not walking in it, go find it. Love the light.

"Roberta Flack, Virtuoso Singer-Pianist Who Ruled the Charts, Dies at 88" by Giovanni Rossonello in *The New York Times*, February 24, 2025

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2. Getting Shy Students to Raise Their Hands in Class

In this *American Educational Research Journal* article, Lukas Mundelsee (Heidelberg University/University of Erfurt) and Susanne Jurkowski (University of Erfurt) make several observations about students' oral participation in classrooms:

- Worldwide, most class time consists of teachers' questions and students' answers.
- Oral participation is predictive of student learning and academic achievement.
- Therefore, creating opportunities for oral participation is an important teacher goal.
- Students' spoken answers give teachers real-time information on their progress.
- Students' responses allow teachers to praise good answers and correct mistakes.
- Speaking in class allows students to think out loud and elaborate on their answers.
- Teachers often call on students who raise their hands (versus cold-calling).
- Students who raise their hands do better on tests, whether they are called on or not.
- Only a handful of students raise their hands and participate orally on a regular basis.

- One study found that one-third of students were silent and never raised their hands.
- Shy students are especially reluctant to volunteer to speak in class.
- Hand-raising is a "gateway" to student learning and achievement.

"Given the important role of oral participation within student learning and achievement," say Mundelsee and Jurkowski, "the silent and passive in-class behavior of shy students causes them to miss important learning opportunities, and may explain their poor school attainments, even though they are no less intelligent."

What is shyness? The authors define it as "a temperamental wariness in the face of social novelty and/or self-conscious behavior in situations of perceived social evaluation." School is an especially problematic arena for shy children since being silent and passive deprives them of important learning opportunities. Teachers tend to mark shy students down, wrongly concluding they are uninterested and lack motivation. Unlike introverts and students who don't care, shy students *do* want to engage, but hold back because they dread being the center of attention and making a mistake, and, if they give the right answer, fear classmates calling them a geek or nerd.

What can teachers do to encourage shy students to get more involved in class discussions? This is an especially important question for young adolescents, who are more sensitive to public embarrassment and peer disapproval. Mundelsee and Jurkowski conducted a study in German middle-school classrooms and identified six key variables:

• *Student-teacher relationships* – A positive bond between teachers and shy students can make students more willing to raise their hands and take part in class discussions. But there are two complicating factors: (a) if shy students believe the teacher understands and sympathizes, they might not raise their hands because they think the teacher won't mind; and (b) if a shy student is seen as too close to the teacher, peers can react negatively toward a "teacher's pet," making it less likely shy students will speak up.

• *Peer relationships* – Perversely, the more popular shy students are with classmates, the less likely they are to volunteer in class. Mundelsee and Jurkowski believe this is because shy students don't want to jeopardize their street cred by standing out as overachievers. Speaking up can also put them in direct competition with their classmates and be seen as "stealing the show."

• *Teacher's wait time* – How long a teacher pauses after asking a question encourages hand-raising by all students, including those who are shy. Mundelsee and Jurkowski speculate that there may be a sweet spot in wait time for shy students – not too short and not too long – because too little wait time pressures students to respond immediately and too long a pause might lead a shy student to ruminate about what the teacher is looking for and lay low.

• *Cold and warm calling* – Shy students dread being cold-called by teachers, and in classes where teachers do this a lot, students' anxiety interferes with concentration and produces more wrong answers if they're called on. Some teachers, aware of this dynamic, refrain from cold-calling shy students, but that, say Mundelsee and Jurkowski, risks reinforcing shy students' *never* participating. Warm calling (allowing students to discuss a question with an elbow partner before being called on) should make things better for shy students, but this

study didn't find that to be true. The quality of teacher-student relationships was another variable in cold and warm calling, making it hard to draw clear conclusions.

• *Class size* – Not surprisingly, bigger classes make it less likely that shy students will raise their hands and participate, but it's not clear that smaller classes will have the opposite effect. In a very small group – for example, seven students with positive relationships – shy students might be comfortable participating, but could also be more anxious about giving wrong answers or becoming the center of attention. Mundelsee and Jurkowski say more research is needed in this area.

• *School subject* – There wasn't a clear finding across different middle-school subject areas. In one area (natural sciences) where shy students seemed to be raising their hands more often, other factors – teacher-student relationships, teacher personality, type of questions, wait-time, and cold-calling – made it impossible to draw a clear conclusion.

[These findings point to the importance of teachers moving away from calling on students who raise their hands and instead doing frequent checks for understanding with well-formulated "hinge-point" questions, using all-class response systems, and orchestrating small- and large-group discussions around students' responses. K.M.]

"Opening the Gateway to Oral Participation: Exploring Facilitative Contextual Factors in the Association Between Student Shyness and Hand Raising" by Lukas Mundelsee and Susanne Jurkowski in *American Educational Research Journal*, February 2025 (Vol. 62, #1, pp. 53-91); Mundelsee can be reached at mundelsee@ibw.uni-heidelberg.de.

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3. The Pressures Felt by U.S. Teens in the Digital Era

"Like it or not, children and teenagers today are live participants in an unprecedented experiment," says Erin O'Donnell in *Harvard Magazine*. Ubiquitous cellphones and hyper-engagement in social media have coincided over the last 15 years with a sharp increase in teen anxiety and depression. Researchers from Harvard's Center for Digital Thriving surveyed 1,545 U.S. teenagers in the fall of 2023 and followed up with focus group interviews.

What emerged was a vivid description of the "grind culture" dominating kids' lives – "this sense of always needing to be productive, to be striving in all these different areas, even at the expense of your health," said Center co-director Emily Weinstein. Some specific findings:

- 56 percent felt "game plan" pressure – to have their future path clear and set;
- 53 percent felt pressure to earn impressive grades or excel in sports;
- 51 percent to look their best;
- 44 percent to have a robust social life;
- 41 percent to be available to support friends;
- 32 percent to stay informed and do good for their community.

All these were more intense for girls and LGBTQ teens. And one in four respondents described symptoms of burnout more common among adults in high-stress jobs.

On the "game plan" pressure, says Weinstein (an adolescent psychologist), it's striking that teens said they didn't have time for the typical adolescent quest to figure out who they are and what they want to be. They seemed to believe that noodling around with new interests and ideas would work to their disadvantage. "Teens literally described feeling guilty for reading a book for pleasure," says Weinstein.

Where do all these pressures come from? Parents, teachers, teens themselves – and social media. About one in five of those surveyed said they were "almost constantly" on social media, messaging apps, and YouTube. Using Instagram, Tik Tok, and Snapchat intensified the pressures teens felt.

On the positive side, playing online games with friends acted as a release valve, distracting kids from the grind. And social media sometimes reduced pressures, says Weinstein: "It can provide meaningful validation, the sense of being seen or not being alone."

The researchers were struck by the fact that 19 percent of those surveyed said they were not feeling pressure in any of the six areas listed above. Several practices and patterns were common among these outliers:

- They got more sleep;
- Were more likely to spend time outdoors;
- Had more open schedules;
- Watched less television;
- Spent less time on social media and the Internet.

The more self-care practices teens engaged in – including seven or more hours of sleep, regular exercise, time in nature, hanging out with a friend, engaging in creative projects – the less likely they were to feel burned out.

"Teen Grind Culture" by Erin O'Donnell in *Harvard Magazine*, March-April 2025 (Vol. 127, #4, pp. 8-10)

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4. Principles of Effective Teaching

In their new online book, *Developing Curriculum for Deep Thinking: The Knowledge Revival*, Tim Surma and co-authors from eight countries summarize research on the critical importance of background knowledge to successful student learning. The core idea: "It's much easier to add new information to an organized set of existing knowledge than to start learning something completely new." And this is not just memorizing a "bunch of facts," they say. "Imparting specific shared knowledge in early grades is important for achieving high levels of citizen competence and high levels of equality and equity."

In the book's appendix, the authors address every teacher's challenge: how to get key information into students' long-term memories. They summarize what studies have found to be the most effective strategies for promoting "durable learning":

- Interest – Content is grounded in real-world issues of significance to students.
- Test expectation – Students know there will be a final exam.
- Coherence – Materials explicitly link concepts to each other and minimize distractions.

- Segmentation – Complex new information is broken down into manageable chunks.
- Prior knowledge – Relevant information stored in long-term memory is activated.
- Dual code and multimedia – Words are accompanied by helpful images.
- Multiple examples – Concrete representations and stories are provided and compared.
- Worked examples – Step-by-step explanations present details of successful procedures.
- Questioning and explaining – Students pose and answer deep-level questions.
- Scaffolding – Support is adjusted to students' needs and removed at mastery.
- Deliberate practice – New knowledge and skills are gone over repeatedly.
- Feedback – Students get information on how they are doing in real time.
- Generative practice – Students produce explanations, outlines, summaries, drawings, answers, mind-maps from memory.
- Retrieval practice – Students pull information from memory, which strengthens links.
- Spaced practice – Learning sessions are spread out over time (versus cramming).
- Interleaved practice – Practice sessions mix different knowledge and skills.
- Self-regulated learning – Students get explicit instruction on understanding their cognitive processes and taking responsibility for their own learning.

Developing Curriculum for Deep Thinking: The Knowledge Revival by Tim Surma, Claudio Vanhees, Michiel Wils, Jasper Nijlunsing, Nuno Crato, John Hattie, Daniel Muijs, Elizabeth Rata, Dylan Wiliam, and Paul Kirschner (Springer, 2025)

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5. Not Overloading Students' Working Memory

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, Jennifer Gonzalez sums up her interview with AP psychology teacher/author Blake Harvard, who says he has a tendency to jazz up lessons in a way that's not helpful. "We've got to give more bells and whistles," he says. "But when we think about the brain, that's the absolute opposite of what we should be doing. The more complex it is, the simpler, the more stripped-down instruction needs to be."

Harvard describes three ways he and other teachers may create cognitive overload for students, and how to avoid crowding too much into working memory, which is inherently limited:

• *The seductive details effect* – A teacher tells an interesting story that's not directly related to the instructional point – for example, describing a fun family vacation in the Grand Canyon. "I know why we do this as teachers," says Harvard, "because we don't want what we're talking about to be boring." But if the story doesn't illustrate or reinforce the main point, it makes it less likely that key information gets into long-term memory. If a story *is* on point, he suggests making the connection explicitly: "Do you see how that relates to the concept?"

• *The split-attention effect* – This happens when a teacher presents part of an idea in a diagram or slide and another part in a text explanation or a later slide. This divides students' attention spatially or temporally, creates extra mental processing, and undermines learning. "What we want to do as much as possible in class," says Harvard, "is to create a situation

where all the information the students need to understand a concept is right there. It's in one place."

• *The redundancy effect* – A teacher gives students a handout while explaining it verbally, which again creates cognitive overload and reduces focus and retention. "We can't read something while also consciously paying attention to someone saying something to us," says Harvard. The exception is accessibility tools – closed captioning on a video or a podcast transcript – which provide helpful scaffolding for some students without creating overload.

Harvard's big point: *Less is more and more is too much*.

"Three Ways You May Be Cognitively Overloading Your Students" by Jennifer Gonzalez and Blake Harvard in *Cult of Pedagogy*, February 16, 2025; Gonzalez can be reached at gonzjenn@cultofpedagogy.com; Harvard's new book is *Do I Have Your Attention? Understanding Memory Constraints and Maximizing Learning* (Routledge, 2025)

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6. Integrating Science and Social Studies With Primary-Grade Literacy

"Increased content-area knowledge [has] consistent, positive effects on primary students' literacy achievement, supporting vocabulary development, comprehension, and overall reading motivation and engagement," say elementary teacher Allison Ryan and Jamie Lipp (Ohio State University) in *The Reading Teacher*. "Consequently, integrated instruction benefits both knowledge-building and literacy development." However, schools' focus on reading and math test scores has led many primary-grade teachers to downgrade social studies and science in the curriculum, and this has happened most frequently in schools serving low-income communities.

During the 2022-23 school year in her diverse suburban Ohio school, Ryan experimented with teaching three curriculum units that integrated content with literacy standards. The first unit was about the life cycle of mealworms, including observation and hands-on experiments with live creatures in a fishtank habitat, watching a video, class discussions, vocabulary development, parts of speech (nouns, action verbs, and adjectives), phonics, dictated sentences, sentences and sentence fragments, writing conventions (including COPS: capitalization, organization, punctuation, and spelling), and extensive reading.

The second unit integrated a study of past, present, and future events in children's lives, learning about verb tenses, writing clear, complete sentences, reading about schools in the past and present, reading an anchor text, describing and discussing connections between individuals, events, ideas, and pieces of information, looking at artifacts from schools in the past, and writing about conclusions.

The third unit integrated writing informative texts with earth science, specifically the solids, liquids, and gases. This unit included hands-on experiments with melting and freezing popsicles, drawing, discussing *first, next,* and *last*, watching a video, listening to the audiobook of *Wemberly's Ice-Cream Star* by Kevin Henkes, participating in an interactive read-aloud of *Sid the Science Kid: Why Did My Ice Pop Melt?* by Susan Korman, making predictions, and

writing paragraphs with introductory sentences and transition words on *How to Make Popsicle Soup* and *How to Make Popsicles*.

The big takeaway, say Ryan and Lipp: it's possible, "within the confines of a primary daily schedule," to teach engaging, knowledge-rich content and simultaneously address a wide range of literacy standards. "The combination of these instructional strategies," they say, "created a rich environment for authentic knowledge building where students were actively engaged with multiple forms of literacy… This approach is essential in preparing our youngest learners for an ever-evolving world."

For this kind of integrated literacy instruction to take place, say Ryan and Lipp, several elements need to be in place:

- Administrators allowing flexibility with the schedule;
- Supporting teachers with necessary materials, including books and science supplies;
- Professional development on integrating science and social studies with literacy. [ChatGPT and other chatbots can provide lots of ideas.]

"Better Together: Integrating Content-Area Curriculum in the Primary Literacy Classroom" by Allison Ryan and Jamie Lipp in *The Reading Teacher*, January 30, 2025; the authors can be reached at ryanallison11@aol.com and lipp.15@osu.edu.

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7. Boosting High-School Juniors and Seniors into Advanced Courses

In this *American Educational Research Journal* article, Megan Austin and Ben Backes (American Institutes for Research), Dan Goldhaber (AIR and University of Washington), Dori Li (Boston Consulting Group), and Francie Streich (Normandale Community College) report on their 2014-15 and 2016-17 study of the state of Washington's Academic Acceleration initiative, which identified proficient 11th and 12th graders for automatic acceleration into AP, IB, and other dual-credit courses. Not all eligible students took advantage of the program, but for those who did, the results were positive:

- Enrollment in advanced courses increased across subject areas in districts implementing Academic Acceleration.
- This was especially true of students who were proficient but were previously overlooked for advanced coursework.
- Enrollment differences by race and ethnicity and SES narrowed or closed.
- Students participating in the program rose to the challenge, performing just as well while moving into more-advanced courses.
- After implementation of the new policy, there was an increase in advanced math course enrollments.
- The probability of students subsequently enrolling in advanced ELA and social studies courses or any advanced course remained at the same level.
- On-time graduation rates for most students were stable or higher.

"The enrollment findings," conclude the researchers, "demonstrate support for automatic enrollment as a lever to increase advanced course enrollment for students with potential to succeed and to increase equitable opportunity for students from historically underrepresented groups."

"Leveling Up: An Academic Acceleration Policy to Increase Equity in Advanced High-School Course Taking" by Megan Austin, Ben Backes, Dan Goldhaber, Dori Li, and Francie Streich in *American Educational Research Journal*, February 2025 (Vol. 62, #1, pp. 136-179); Austin can be reached at maustin@air.org.

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8. Should We Measure School Quality Using Downstream GPAs?

"Everyone knows standardized tests paint an incomplete picture of schools' impacts on students," say David Griffin and Amber Northern in *Education Gadfly*. "Yet coming up with thoughtful alternatives to tests is easier said than done." The ideal measure of a school's quality, they say, needs to be:

- Valid – capturing something we care about;
- Reliable – reasonably accurate and consistent over time;
- Timely – we shouldn't have to wait for years to get the data;
- Fair – it doesn't disadvantage schools that start with lower achievement;
- Trustworthy – it doesn't incentivize lowering standards or gaming the system.

It's been hard to find a school quality indicator that meets all these criteria.

What about students' grade-point averages, which most school systems collect? The possible problem: making GPAs a high-stakes indicator of school quality can lead to grade inflation. But how about looking at students' GPA in the next school level they attend – judging a K-5 elementary school on its graduates' GPA in a middle school's sixth grade, and a middle school on its students' GPA in a high school's ninth grade?

"A measure that is based on students' subsequent GPAs has at least two compelling features," say Griffin and Northern:

- GPA captures grades in all subjects, giving a comprehensive picture of school quality.
- There's no incentive for a school to inflate grades, teach to the test, or socially promote students, none of which would boost students' performance at their next school.

So could looking at "subsequent GPA" provide a better picture of schools' contributions to student learning?

To answer this question, Jing Liu (University of Maryland) and Seth Gershenson (American University) crunched a decade of student course grades from schools in Maryland and North Carolina. Their tentative conclusion: downstream GPA data could be valid, reliable, timely (only a year old), fair, and trustworthy (very difficult to game).

Griffin and Northern suggest experimenting with subsequent GPA as a supplement to test data "because, at the end of the day, it sends a clear message to schools that one of their core missions is to help their graduates succeed in their next step – not just in reading and math, but in *all* subjects – and not just on tests, given the array of non-academic attributes that

grades measure. In short, it gives educators whose contributions are sometimes shortchanged by existing measures an officially sanctioned reason to do something that everyone should want them to do: teach to the best of their ability."

"Make Room, Test Scores: Introducing 'Indicators of High School and Middle School Readiness'" by David Griffin and Amber Northern in *Education Gadfly*, February 20, 2025

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9. Recommended Manga "Romantasy" Books

In *School Library Journal*, Brigid Alverson recommends a new genre of manga fantasy books about love and adventure:

- *In the Name of the Mermaid Princess* by Yoshino Fumikawa, grade 5 and up
- *The Small-Animallike Lady Is Adored by the Ice Prince* by Hisui, illustrated by Mugi Sawai, grade 8 and up
- *I Abandoned My Engagement Because My Sister Is a Tragic Heroine, But Somehow I Became Entangled with a Righteous Prince* by Fuyutsuki Koki, grade 8 and up
- *Always a Catch!: How I Punched My Way into Marrying a Prince* by Mayo Momoyo and Itsuki Mito, illustrated by Kaka Nagato, grade 8 and up
- *My Sister Took My Fiancé and Now I'm Being Courted by a Beastly Prince* by Yu Sakurai, illustrated by Kiduki Hoshikawa, grade 8 and up
- *Colette Decides to Die* by Alto Yukimura, grade 8 and up
- *The Villainess's Guide to (Not) Falling in Love* by Yoimachi Touya, adapted by Shiri Shiono, illustrated by Ren Sakuma, grade 10 and up

"Romantasy Manga" by Brigid Alverson in *School Library Journal*, February 2025 (Vol. 71, #2, pp. 38-40)

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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 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 early Tuesday (there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTMI version. Artificial intelligence is not used.

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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