

Marshall Memo 613

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

November 23, 2015

In This Issue:

1. [Classroom practices that boost – and dampen – student agency](#)
2. [Overcoming cognitive biases that hamper innovative thinking](#)
3. [Six critical-thinking tools for navigating a complicated world](#)
4. [What to do when entering a new work situation](#)
5. [Feedback for someone having trouble accepting feedback](#)
6. [Which teachers end up with the neediest students in their classes?](#)
7. [Fostering reading joy and proficiency](#)
8. [A study of teacher expectations in first-grade classrooms](#)
9. [Online tools for homework and study skills](#)
10. Short items: [Surveys on social-emotional learning](#)

Quotes of the Week

“Young people with high levels of agency do not respond passively to their circumstances; they tend to seek meaning and act with purpose to achieve the conditions they desire in their own and others’ lives. The development of agency may be as important an outcome of schooling as the skills we measure with standardized testing.”

Ronald Ferguson, Sarah Phillips, Jacob Rowley, and Jocelyn Friedlander (see item #1)

“Be curious, logical, and collaborative.”

Richard Dawkins, quoted in “Lives We Can Learn From” by Lisa Burrell in *Harvard Business Review*, December 2015 (Vol. 93, #10, p. 124-125), <http://bit.ly/1YpvCwj>

“Great first impressions rarely hinge on what you reveal about yourself; what matters is how you make your counterpart feel.”

Keith Rollag (see item #4)

“Want to make someone defensive? Tell him he’s being defensive!”

Deborah Grayson Riegel (see item #5)

“It is important that we recognize we have two equally important reading goals: to teach our students to read and to teach our students to want to read.”

Linda Gambrell in “Getting Students Hooked on the Reading Habit” in *The Reading Teacher*, November/December 2015 (Vol. 69, #3, p. 259-263), <http://bit.ly/1P2AN3y>

“If we know nothing else about reading, we know that the way to become good at reading is to read. A lot.”

Deborah Hollimon (see item #7)

1. Classroom Practices That Boost – and Dampen – Student Agency

In this paper from Harvard’s Achievement Gap Initiative, Ronald Ferguson, Sarah Phillips, Jacob Rowley, and Jocelyn Friedlander report on their study of the ways in which grade 6-9 teachers in 490 schools influenced their students’ non-cognitive skills. The central variable that Ferguson and his colleagues measured was students’ agency. This, they write, “is the capacity and propensity to take purposeful initiative – the opposite of helplessness. Young people with high levels of agency do not respond passively to their circumstances; they tend to seek meaning and act with purpose to achieve the conditions they desire in their own and others’ lives. The development of agency may be as important an outcome of schooling as the skills we measure with standardized testing.”

The researchers used data from Tripod surveys of students’ perceptions of their teachers [see Marshall Memo 461] to examine how Ferguson’s “Seven C” components of instruction (caring, conferring, captivating, clarifying, consolidating, challenging, and managing the classroom) influenced agency, which manifested itself in the following ways:

- Punctuality – The student tries hard to arrive to class on time.
- Good conduct – The student is cooperative, respectful, and on task.
- Effort – The student pushes him- or herself to do the best quality work.
- Help-seeking – The student is not shy about asking for help when needed.
- Conscientiousness – The student is developing a commitment to produce quality work.
- Happiness – The student regards the classroom as a happy place to be.
- Anger – The student experiences this in class, which may boost or dampen agency.
- Mastery orientation – The student is committed to mastering lessons in the class.
- Sense of efficacy – The student believes he or she can be successful in the class.
- Satisfaction – The student is satisfied with what he or she has achieved in the class
- Growth mindset – The student is learning to believe that he or she can get smarter.
- Future orientation – The student is becoming more focused on future aspirations (e.g., college).

The researchers also identified a number of disengagement behaviors – the opposite of agency: faking effort, generally not trying, giving up if the work is too hard, and avoiding help.

What did the data reveal? Ferguson and his colleagues found that some teaching behaviors were *agency boosters* and others were *agency dampers*, indicating the delicate balance teachers must maintain between what they *ask* of students (academic and behavioral press) and what they *give* students (social and academic support). The details:

• *Agency boosters* – Requiring rigor came through strongly in the study – asking students to think more rigorously by striving to understand concepts, not simply memorize facts, or to explain their reasoning. This boosts mastery orientation, increases effort, growth mindset, conscientiousness, and future aspirations – but sometimes diminishes students’ happiness in class, feelings of efficacy, and satisfaction with what they’ve achieved. “These slightly dampened emotions in the short term,” say the researchers, “seem small prices to pay for the motivational, mindset, and behavioral payoffs we predict to result from requiring rigorous thinking. Combinations of teaching practices – for example, appropriately differentiated assignments, lucid explanations of new material, and curricular supports to accompany demands for rigor – seem quite relevant in this context.”

• *Agency dampers* – Caring may sometimes entail coddling: “in an effort to be emotionally supportive,” say the authors, “some teachers may be especially accommodating and this may depress student conduct as well as academic persistence.” Conferring can sometimes lack a clear purpose, which can undermine student effort and reduce time on task. Clearing up confusion can occur too automatically, with teachers doing the work for students and denying them the incentive and opportunity to diagnose and correct their own misunderstandings, which diminishes effort and conscientiousness.

• *Future-orientation boosters* – Caring and captivating are the teaching components most closely associated with college aspirations, the researchers found.

• *Achievement boosters* – Challenge and classroom management are the components correlated with students doing well on standardized tests, as the Measures of Effective Teaching study found.

“The point is not that there is a trade-off between annual learning gains and higher aspirations,” say Ferguson and colleagues. “Instead, the point is that the most important agency boosters for each are different. A balanced approach to instructional improvement will prioritize care and captivate to bolster aspirations, and challenge and classroom management to strengthen the skills that standardized tests measure. Certainly, without the skills that tests measure, college aspirations might be futile. But in turn, without college aspirations, the payoffs to those skills may be limited.”

Here is their distillation of ten classroom practices that develop agency:

- *Care* – Be attentive and sensitive, but avoid coddling students in ways that hold them to lower standards of effort and performance.
- *Confer* – Encourage and respect students’ perspectives and honor student voice, but do so while remaining focused on instructional goals – and don’t waste class time with idle chatter.
- *Captivate* – Make lessons stimulating and relevant while knowing that some students may hide their interest.
- *Clarify with lucid explanations* – Strive to develop clearer explanations, including how the skills and knowledge you teach are useful in the exercise of effective agency in real life – especially for the material students find most difficult.

- *Clarify by clearing up confusion* – Take regular steps to detect and respond to confusion in class, but do so in ways that share responsibility with students.
- *Clarify with instructive feedback* – Give instructive feedback in ways that provide scaffolding for students to solve their own problems.
- *Consolidate* – Regularly summarize lessons to help consolidate learning.
- *Challenge by requiring rigor* – Press students to think deeply instead of superficially about what they are learning. Anticipate some resistance from students who might prefer a less-stressful approach – but be tenacious.
- *Challenge by requiring persistence* – Consistently require students to keep trying and searching for ways to succeed even when work is difficult.
- *Classroom management* – Achieve respectful, orderly, and on-task student behavior by using clarity, captivation, and challenge instead of coercion.

“The Influence of Teaching: Beyond Standardized Test Scores: Engagement, Mindsets, and Agency – A Study of 16,000 Sixth Through Ninth-Grade Classrooms” by Ronald Ferguson with Sarah Phillips, Jacob Rowley, and Jocelyn Friedlander, a paper from The Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University, Oct. 2015, <http://www.agi.harvard.edu/publications.php>

[*Back to page one*](#)

2. Overcoming Cognitive Biases That Hamper Innovative Thinking

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Tony McCaffrey and Jim Pearson (Innovation Accelerator) say that one of the biggest barriers to innovation (and, potentially, more-successful outcomes) is “functional fixedness” – the tendency to fixate on the most common use of an object (or conventional assumptions about an activity) rather than thinking of them in novel ways. For example, when the *Titanic* struck an iceberg in the North Atlantic in April of 1912 and began to sink, nobody thought of using lifeboats to ferry passengers to flat places on the iceberg so they could stay out of the frigid water until a rescue ship arrived. “In a nautical context, an iceberg is a hazard to be avoided,” say McCaffrey and Pearson; “it’s very hard to see it any other way.” The *Titanic* took almost three hours to sink, but no alternatives to putting people in lifeboats were implemented, and only 705 of the 2,200 souls on board survived.

Here’s McCaffrey’s and Pearson’s analysis of three cognitive biases that impede creative thinking – and how organizations can overcome them.

- *Functional fixedness* – German psychologist Karl Duncker once devised a brainteaser to demonstrate how hard it is to escape conventional thinking: Using only a box of thumbtacks, a book of matches, and a candle, affix the candle to a wall so that when it’s lit, wax doesn’t drip onto the floor. The solution: empty the box of tacks, light the candle, drip some wax onto the inside of the box, place the candle on the wax and let it harden so the candle will stand upright, then tack the box to the wall so it acts as a shelf that will catch melting wax. The reason most people don’t figure this out is that they can’t get away from seeing the box as something that holds tacks. “What causes functional fixedness?” ask McCaffrey and Pearson. “When we see a common object, we automatically screen out awareness of features that are not

important for its use. This is an efficient neurological tactic for everyday life, but it's the enemy of innovation."

The best way to overcome functional fixedness is the "generic parts technique" – thinking of each of the components of an object or practice and asking, *Can it be broken down further?* and *Does our description imply a particular use?* For example, when we think of a candle as wax with a fibrous wick running through the core, it's easier to get past the conventional function of the wick (it burns when the candle is lit) and realize that it could potentially be used as a string. Similarly, if we think of an iceberg as a floating surface 200-400 feet long, it's easier to think of its potential as a life-saving platform.

- *Design fixation* – McCaffrey and Pearson handed people a broom and other everyday objects and asked them to list as many features and associations for each as they could. On average, participants overlooked 21 of the 32 possibilities the researchers had generated. Why? Because people had a fixed idea of what each object was designed for. To overcome this, the authors recommend using a checklist to think more generically about each object's basic features – for example, the materials it's composed of, its aesthetic properties, how it engages the senses and emotions, and so on.

- *Goal fixedness* – The language we use tends to limit or broaden our thinking. If we're asked to think of ways to *adhere* something to a garbage can, we might think of using glue or tape. But if we're asked to *fasten* something to the can, we might think of using a nail, string, Velcro, binder clips, a large paper clip, and so on (the WordNet online thesaurus lists 61 ways to *fasten* things, whereas *adhere* has only four). When searching for new ways to tackle difficult problems – for example, reducing concussions in football – it's a good idea to rephrase the goal in as many different ways as possible: lessen trauma, weaken crashes, soften jolts, reduce energy, absorb energy, minimize force, exchange forces, substitute energy, oppose energy, repel energy, lessen momentum, and so on.

Pearson generated these and other possibilities and followed up by doing a Google search to see which approaches hadn't been explored as much as others. He found that "repel energy" had relatively few search results, and dreamed up the idea of making a league's football helmets magnetic with the same polarity so that two helmets would repel each other when they came closer – and, because of their circular shape, would glance off rather than colliding. Pearson submitted a patent for the idea, only to find out that someone else had beaten him to it by a few weeks. "We tip our hat to that person," say the authors.

"At its most basic level, problem solving consists of two connected activities," say McCaffrey and Pearson: "framing a goal and combining resources to accomplish it. Each variation of the goal, and every discovery of a 'hidden' feature of an available resource, can suggest a different course to take." They suggest a graphic approach, writing the goal at the top – in the case of the *Titanic*, *Save passengers* – and writing resources at the bottom – *Lifeboats* (following conventional thinking). In 1912, this approach produced only one way to solve the problem: *Put people in lifeboats*. Broadening the thinking at the top of the page, the goal of saving passengers could be elaborated as *Keep people warm and breathing* and *Keep people out of the water*. Starting at the bottom of the page, the list of resources could be expanded to

include *wooden tables, planks, car tires and inner tubes, steamer trunks, and the iceberg itself*. Joining the goals and possible resources, a number of overlooked solutions emerge that could have been used in the hours before the liner sank, under the general heading of *Put people on floating things: Building platforms between lifeboats, building platforms on top of tires, tying together steamer trunks, and finding accessible places on the iceberg and using lifeboats to ferry people to them*.

“On that April night in 1912,” say McCaffrey and Pearson, “none of these ideas might have worked, particularly since it took so long for people to understand the peril they were in. But the point of such an exercise is not to discover the ‘right solution’; it is to uncover as many connections between the goal and the widest view of the features of available resources as possible so that people look beyond the obvious... This systematic approach takes some of the mystery out of innovation.”

The authors recommend solving problems by putting the goal(s) at the top of a wall and the resources at the bottom and engaging in silent “brainstorming.” People write their ideas on sticky notes and put them on the appropriate place on the wall. This approach has a number of advantages over conventional brainstorming:

- The talkative few can’t dominate.
- The facilitator doesn’t have to keep people from hijacking the discussion or judging others.
- People can work in parallel, so ideas are generated more quickly.
- Big-picture thinkers can work side by side with detail-oriented colleagues.
- No one needs to summarize the session – a photo of the wall will do the trick.
- Ideas are naturally grouped at the appropriate spot by the logic of the wall.
- Ideas are concise since they need to fit on a sticky note.
- Silence lets people move between writing down ideas, putting them on the wall, and building on others’ ideas.
- There’s less fear of judgment by the boss or others.
- The wall can be added to over time, even by people who aren’t physically present.

“Find Innovation Where You Least Expect It” by Tony McCaffrey and Jim Pearson in *Harvard Business Review*, December 2015 (Vol. 93, #12, p. 82-89),

<https://hbr.org/2015/12/find-innovation-where-you-least-expect-it>

[*Back to page one*](#)

3. Six Critical-Thinking Tools for Navigating a Complicated World

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Richard Nisbett (University of Michigan/ Ann Arbor) shares several critical-thinking tools that have helped him understand the world and make better decisions:

- *The sunk-cost trap* – If you paid \$50 for a ticket to a basketball game weeks in advance and at the last minute the star player got sick and there was a major snowstorm, would you go just because you’d invested the money? The best thought experiment is to ask if you’d go if someone called on the day of the game and offered you a free ticket. Economists, who

developed the sunk-cost principle, “aren’t likely to finish an expensive meal just because they’ve paid for it, or sit through a boring movie,” says Nisbett. “Likewise, they would scoff at a politician who advocated continued funding for a weapons system acknowledged to be of poor quality on the grounds that the money already spent should not be wasted.”

- *The law of large numbers* – “People are inclined to overgeneralize about other people,” says Nisbett. “They believe they can be confident about how honest or friendly someone is by virtue of observing someone in one situation for a short time.” This is particularly treacherous with interviews: studies have shown that when choosing between two applicants, the likelihood of choosing the right one goes from 50-50 to around 53 percent based on an interview, whereas looking at GPA, achievement scores, work record, and letters of recommendation can move the needle to a 65-75-percent probability. In the same way, a student trying to decide between two colleges would be far more likely to make the right choice by listening to the opinions of friends who attend each college than from fleeting impressions from a single visit – the friends have been exposed to much more information than the student on a one-day visit.

- *Confirmation bias* – “We find it too easy to generate hypotheses, too easy to think of evidence that would support them, and too easy to refute evidence against them,” says Nisbett. For example, a child had the MMR vaccination and was subsequently diagnosed with autism – therefore the disease was caused by the vaccination. There’s strong tendency not to search for evidence that might disprove the hypothesis.

- *Ignoring the HiPPO* – Rather than relying on the highest-paid person’s opinion, test the plausibility of a possible course of action with a number of people. “Assumptions about novel human behavior, and human behavior in novel situations, tend to be wrong,” says Nisbett.

- *The confounded variable* – If people who take multivitamins live longer, does it follow that taking multivitamins prolongs life? No, because people who take multivitamins tend to get more exercise, watch their cholesterol and blood pressure, eat more vegetables, and drink in moderation. The first variable is confounded (correlated) with others, any of which could lead to longevity. “Many of the science articles you see in the newspaper, and most of the health articles, fall prey to the confounded-variable error,” says Nisbett.

- *KISS* – It’s definitely better to keep it simple (stupid), or, as Occam said somewhat more politely, use a razor to shave away unnecessary concepts.

Nisbett is optimistic that, once taught, these principles can stick in people’s minds, especially if they apply them a couple of times in new situations. “Every time they are used,” he says, “the likelihood of subsequent use may become greater.”

“Thinking for Dummies” by Richard Nisbett in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 20, 2015 (Vol. LXII, #12, p. B4-B5), no free e-link available

[Back to page one](#)

4. What to Do When Entering a New Work Situation

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Keith Rollag (Babson College) says that for professionals entering a new work situation, there are three crucial getting-to-know-you skills that aren't always handled well because of anxiety and uncertainty:

• *Introducing yourself* – Many people hesitate to do this, says Rollag, because of worries about interrupting or bothering people, fear of making mistakes during an introduction, and the possibility of being brushed off. But if you don't introduce yourself to strangers up front, he says, there's a strong possibility you will fall into "a pattern of awkward smiles, nods, and waves and never forge critical relationships." Some pointers:

- Put yourself in the other person's shoes. If it were you, you'd probably be delighted to meet the new kid on the block.
- Practice your opening lines. "Write down, rehearse, and experiment with what you will tell others about yourself," suggests Rollag. "Note what sustains interest and what causes other people's eyes to glaze over."
- Make the other person feel heard, valued, and respected. "Great first impressions rarely hinge on what you reveal about yourself," he says; "what matters is how you make your counterpart feel."
- Write things down. "Don't trust your memory," he advises. "As soon as you can, write down everything you have learned about the person's background and interests."

• *Remembering names* – More than 80 percent of the leaders Rollag has worked with confess that they have trouble retaining names in a new situation. A British study found that people's worst fear is forgetting the name of someone being introduced. Doing better at this is a priority since "People feel more warmly toward those who remember crucial information about them, including their names, and that amity can serve as a springboard to fruitful conversations and deeper trust." Rollag's suggestions:

- Commit to focusing and paying attention when being introduced to a new person.
- Repeat the name up front, and reinforce your recall by retrieving it during the conversation.
- Write it down afterward.
- Study and retest your recall, matching names with faces.
- Use vivid imagery, associating each person with a mental picture and some memorable detail or mnemonic.
- Use cheat sheets before a meeting to refresh your memory.

• *Asking questions* – "I didn't ask enough questions," confess many leaders as they think back on their early days in a new organization. Why? Fear of interrupting busy co-workers, not wanting to seem dumb or incompetent, and general insecurity. Here are Rollag's suggestions:

- Be clear on what you want and why. Information? Advice? Feedback? Assistance?
- Is this the right person and the right time? "One trick is to ask people during introductions if you can contact them later for advice," he says. Another is an open-ended question like, "Who might explain how to...?"

- Use short, to-the-point questions, for example, “Can you show me how to format this report? Five minutes of your time, and I’ll be good to go.”
- Say thank you and close the loop. “Don’t underestimate the power of gratitude,” says Rollag. It makes people feel valued and more likely to be helpful in the future.
- Cultivate a go-to buddy – preferably a veteran who still remembers what it’s like to be a newbie.

“Managing Yourself: Success in New Situations” by Keith Rollag in *Harvard Business Review*, December 2015 (Vol. 93, #12, p. 112-115), <http://bit.ly/1OoUCPw>

[Back to page one](#)

5. Feedback for Someone Having Trouble Accepting Feedback

In this *Harvard Business Review* online article, Deborah Grayson Riegel (Wharton School and The Boda Group) has suggestions for managers who get pushback when they have difficult conversations with colleagues – defensiveness, shutting down, yessing them to death and not following through on promises, or calling in sick on the day of a performance review. “My advice to leaders in these situations is to take a break from giving other performance-related feedback,” says Riegel. “Instead, start giving feedback on how the employee receives feedback... It should be its own topic of conversation, addressed when you have enough evidence to assume a pattern and when both you and your colleague have adequate time and energy to tackle it.” Here are her tips for these talks:

- *Make the case.* Say that it’s important for everyone to be able to receive critical feedback seriously and professionally – and that resistance isn’t helpful to the team, the organization, or the person’s professional reputation.

- *Be curious.* The person may not see his or her behavior the way you do. Ask an open-ended question about how the person sees the supervisory dynamic.

- *Use neutral language.* “Want to make someone defensive?” asks Riegel. “Tell him he’s being defensive!” Avoid blaming words and language with a negative connotation. Try something like, “When I give you feedback, I notice that you look at the floor. I’m curious to know what’s going on for you.”

- *Ask for feedback.* It’s possible that your communication style is too direct, the timing of your critical conversations has been bad, or that you’ve sent mixed messages by pairing negative feedback with praise. Perhaps ask, “How am I contributing to this problem?” and model how to receive critical feedback.

- *Eat humble pie.* Talk about a time you messed up, were criticized, and didn’t take it well – and what you learned from that.

- *Secure a commitment.* Here’s a possible opening statement: “So moving forward, here’s what I’d like to see happen: I’ll give you some feedback and if you feel like you disagree, have a different perspective on it, or that I am not getting the whole picture, you’ll tell me that *in the meeting*. I’ll agree to really listen to your take on the situation, and we’ll come up with a plan together. Does that work for you?”

• *Acknowledge positive change.* After the feedback-on-feedback talk, start looking for evidence of improvement and immediately reinforce it.

“When Your Employee Doesn’t Take Feedback” by Deborah Grayson Riegel in *Harvard Business Review*, November 6, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1Hj3aYD>

[Back to page one](#)

6. Which Teachers End Up with the Neediest Students in Their Classes?

“Improving the school performance of students from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds and closing achievement gaps with more-advantaged students are among the most important challenges of modern educational reform,” say Jason Grissom (Vanderbilt University) and Demetra Kalogrides and Susanna Loeb (Stanford University) in this *Peabody Journal of Education* article. In the past, researchers and policymakers have focused mainly on inequities of teaching quality *across* schools – in particular, the tendency for schools with the neediest students to have less-experienced and less-qualified teachers. In this study, Grissom, Kalogrides, and Loeb looked for inequities in the way students are assigned to classes *within* schools.

The authors compared student assignments, student demographic and achievement data, and teacher experience in a large urban district, and also interviewed a number of educators. They found that teachers who had been in a building the longest tended to have fewer students of color, fewer students from low-income families, fewer students with records of disciplinary problems and excessive absences, and fewer students with low achievement. How did this happen? “Teachers who have worked ‘within the system’ over longer periods likely have accrued various forms of social and organizational capital, including respect from school leaders and other actors, understanding of school organizational processes, and relationships within the school community,” say Grissom, Kalogrides, and Loeb. “This greater capital, in turn, can constitute a source of influence in school decisions, including those regarding how students are assigned to teachers.” Another possibility, say the authors: principals reward teachers with more years of service by assigning them more-advanced classes that tend to enroll fewer disadvantaged students.

The student assignment process is an arena in which multiple interests are at play, say the authors: “Seats in a given teacher’s classroom are a finite resource, and different actors may have competing interests over how those seats are filled.” Specifically:

- Parents and their advocates might lobby for a teacher because they believe he or she is more effective, better at classroom management, or “nicer” than other teachers.
- Building administrators with the hot breath of accountability on their necks might steer certain groups of students to teachers with a track record of raising achievement.
- Teachers may prefer to teach certain types of students over others.
- Students may have preferences in classroom assignments.

“If assignments are a political process,” say Grissom, Kalogrides, and Loeb, “we would expect assignment outcomes to tend to reflect the preferences of whichever groups hold the most influence.” In the district they studied, it was clearly veteran teachers who had the most

influence on which students ended up in which classes. “Input to assignment decisions instead generally comes from school leaders and other school personnel who, at least on average, do not sufficiently take the interests or needs of disadvantaged student populations into account in resolving the competing demands at play,” say the researchers, who are critical of “this failure to advocate for or represent the interests of marginalized groups...”

“From an equity perspective, this pattern is concerning,” conclude the authors: “Given the evidence that more-experienced teachers are more effective, the sorting within schools of more-experienced teachers away from students with fewer outside-school resources and greater learning and behavioral challenges is likely to compound student disadvantages rather than address them... This inequitable distribution across classrooms within schools means that policy efforts to move effective teachers into schools with larger numbers of low-achieving students, students of color, or students from low-income backgrounds are likely to go only so far in addressing equitable access to high-quality teaching and, as a result, achievement gaps among student groups.”

“The Micropolitics of Educational Inequality: The Case of Teacher-Student Assignments” by Jason Grissom, Demetra Kalogrides, and Susanna Loeb in *Peabody Journal of Education*, Fall 2015 (Vol. 90, #5, p. 601-614), <http://bit.ly/1SVrkZG>; Grissom can be reached at jason.grissom@vanderbilt.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

7. Fostering Reading Joy and Proficiency

“If we know nothing else about reading, we know that the way to become good at reading is to read. A lot,” says Deborah Hollimon (U.S. Air Force Academy Preparatory School) in this *Literacy Daily* article. “And because reading is a voluntary act, it is vital that students are motivated enough to begin to read and engaged enough to keep on reading for a lifetime.” Hollimon boils down the secret to getting students reading to the acronym ACTS:

- Access – All students must be able to get their hands on a rich supply of good things to read, she says. “Instead of buying that ‘silver bullet’ commercial reading program, use those funds to prepare for pleasure and voracious reading by stocking classrooms and libraries with beautiful and intriguing books and magazines. Entice students with accessible displays of curated books of high interest at appropriate reading levels.”

- Choice – “If the point is for students to enjoy reading enough to want to keep reading,” says Hollimon, “then they must be allowed, even encouraged, to read for pleasure – not just for information, not just closely or critically, but for fun!” Being able to select reading material from a wide array of choices is vital for this to occur.

- Time – Once students are out of school, says Hollimon, “video games and social networking become the default leisure activities and pleasure reading is displaced.” That’s why it’s vital to carve out significant uninterrupted time during the school day so students can get immersed in reading. Then there’s a chance that it will continue after the bell rings.

- *Socialize* – Students who have found texts they love to read will want to talk about them, and during-school time – structured and unstructured – has to be allocated for that as well. This is especially important for students who don't have a reading culture at home.

“Enacting the ACTS of Reading” by Deborah Hollimon in *Literacy Daily*, November 17, 2015, <http://bit.ly/116YNjI>; Hollimon can be reached at deborah.hollimon@usafa.edu.

[Back to page one](#)

8. A Study of Teacher Expectations in First-Grade Classrooms

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Amber Northern summarizes a study by Yasmiyn Irizarry in *Social Science Research* on racial differences in how teachers saw their first graders' literacy skills. The study found that:

- Teachers assessed students in the average range quite accurately.
- Teachers rated the literacy skills of low-achieving minority students (Asian, non-white Latino, and African-American) more positively than their actual performance.
- Teachers rated the literacy skills of lower-achieving white students more negatively than their actual performance.
- Teachers underestimated the skills of their higher-performing minority students.
- Teachers overestimated the skills of their higher-performing white students.

What's going on here? Irizarry conjectures that these teachers were keenly aware of equity issues and used “restraint” in applying labels like “far below average” to low-achieving minority students. At the same time, they were harder on low-achieving white students for whom they seemed to have higher expectations.

On the troubling phenomenon of teachers' inaccurate assessment of their high-performing students, which clearly reveals differing expectations for minority and white students, Irizarry has this to say: “If the cognitive abilities of high-achieving minority students hold less value in teachers' overall perceptions, they may also hold less value during decisions concerning academic placements, access to enrichment opportunities, and the distribution of resources and support.”

“Racial Differences in Teachers' Evaluations of High, Average, and Low-Performing Students” by Amber Northern in *The Education Gadfly*, November 18, 2015, (Vol. 15, #45), <http://bit.ly/1SgekxS>

[Back to page one](#)

9. Online Tools for Homework and Study Skills

In this *New York Times* article, Tara Parker-Pope recommends a series of online homework and study aids:

- www.Easybib.com – Students can type in a website or source name and Easybib will automatically generate a citation in whatever style format the teacher requires.
- www.Prezi.com – A cloud-based presentation tool that allows for zooming and panning and can make presentations more dynamic and fun.

- www.Quizlet.com – Students can create flashcards and study guides to review material online or on a mobile device. Created by high-school students in 2007, the site has more than 40 million study sets generated by users.
- www.Storybird.com – This site helps students create a story or poem or present material using a variety of illustrations.
- www.Sparknotes.com – Summaries of literary works with analyses of important quotes, key facts, study questions, essay topics, and quizzes.
- www.HowLongToReadThis.com – Students enter the name of a written work, a timer determines their reading speed as they read a sample paragraph, and they’re told how long it will take to finish the book.
- www.KhanAcademy.org – Brief tutorials on a wide array of topics and grade levels.
- Kindle books – Features include highlighting, vocabulary help, and being able to search a long book for a key passage.
- Google Docs – A group of students can create, edit, collaborate on, and store documents, which can be opened on any computer with an Internet connection. Teachers can add notes and comment on drafts.

“Help with Homework, Pixel by Pixel” by Tara Parker-Pope in *The New York Times*, November 17, 2015, <http://nyti.ms/1XaaOM2>

[Back to page one](#)

10. Short Item:

Surveys on social-emotional learning – Panorama is making available a free tool to measure 22 dimensions of the non-cognitive domain, which is broken into three areas: student competencies; student supports and school environment; and teacher skills and perspectives. Available at: <https://www.panoramaed.com/social-emotional-learning>

[Back to page one](#)

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*If you have feedback or suggestions,
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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 44 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 64 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).

Subscriptions:

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

Website:

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

- How to subscribe or renew
- A detailed rationale for the Marshall Memo
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Article selection criteria
- Topics (with a count of articles from each)
- Headlines for all issues
- Reader opinions (with results of an annual survey)
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

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

- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues (also in Word and PDF)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- A collection of "classic" articles from all 11 years

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief/Public Education NewsBlast
Better: Evidence-Based Education
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter
District Administration
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Literacy Today
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Teacher
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine
Wharton Leadership Digest