Marshall Memo 1002

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 11, 2023

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"An LLM [large language model] is like a brain without a mind – no consciousness, metacognition, agency, senses, experiences of implicit knowledge of what it is like to have a biological body, a family, friends, a culture, and an ethical sense with moral values."

Christopher Dede (Harvard Graduate School of Education), quoted in "Reckoning with AI" by Kathy Ishizuka in *School Library Journal*, September 2023 (Vol. 69, #9, p. 8)

"In a realm where knowledge meets innovation, school libraries are embracing the transformative potential of artificial intelligence to reimagine the educational landscape and empower students in unprecedented ways."

ChatGPT's response when asked about the potential of AI for school libraries, in "Mission Critical" by Andrew Bauld in *School Library Journal*, September 2023 (Vol. 69, #9, pp. 24-29)

"At Seckinger High School, teachers are already talking with students about how ChatGPT can be a collaborative partner to provide feedback, removing any excuse for not turning in a revised essay."

Andrew Bauld (*ibid.*) reporting on this Gwinnett County (GA) school's approach to AI

"It's incredibly hard to get better at something if you try it once in September and you don't get another shot at it until the next September."

Justin Reich (see item #3)

"By delving deeply into challenging content and grappling with complex problems, students develop the resilience, adaptability, and self-directed learning skills necessary to overcome academic setbacks and navigate future challenges."

Kristina Kyles-Smith (see item #2)

"The vast majority of people aren't ready to receive criticism unless they feel safe with the person providing it."

Erin Meyer (see item #4)

1. Timothy Shanahan on Principals' Role in Literacy Improvement

In this article on his website, Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/Chicago) urges district leaders to avoid the "major error" he and his colleagues made with the Chicago Reading Initiative in the early 2000s. Their mistake was starting with hiring and training literacy coaches, rather than working first with principals. They learned the hard way that when principals don't have a good understanding of the literacy initiative, they can undermine the effort – for example:

- Focusing on the "bubble" students (those nearest the achievement criterion);
- Assigning the strongest reading teachers to the grades taking standardized tests;
- Not placing the most effective teachers in the primary grades and/or with the highest-need students.

These principals were trying to boost their schools' reading scores, but were in fact not serving the long-term interests of all students.

Shanahan distinguishes between what has a direct and an indirect effect on students' literacy learning. *Direct* impact comes from:

- The quality of teaching in classrooms day to day;
- The amount of time students spend on literacy instruction;
- A focus on research-based components: phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, language, comprehension strategies, content knowledge, writing, and spelling.

Literacy coaches provide teachers with professional development, observe and coach in classrooms, and help teachers make the best use of curriculum materials.

The principal's impact is *indirect*, channeled through those who work directly with students. But school leaders' role is highly significant, and they need to be prepared for these key actions:

- Setting school policy on an effective strategy for raising literacy achievement;
- Hiring effective teachers and assigning them where they are most needed;
- Helping teachers and families understand and buy into the initiative;
- Convincing teachers and families to increase the amount of literacy learning time;
- Getting everyone focused on literacy activities that make the biggest difference;
- Purchasing instructional materials aligned with the initiative;
- Implementing an appropriate schedule and minimizing interruptions to instruction;
- Building "supportive collaboration" with literacy coaches;
- Orchestrating helpful PD;
- Knowing what to look for in classrooms and giving teachers pertinent feedback;

- Understanding assessment results and discussing them with coaches and teachers;
- Fostering a professional culture that supports and retains effective teachers.

To carry out these key functions, says Shanahan, principals don't need to be literacy experts, but they do need to understand reading research and what will move the needle for all students. With the right training and support, they can "understand, appreciate, and facilitate teachers' efforts – including the efforts of coaches."

"A Big Mistake in Reading Improvement Initiatives – Don't Make This One" by Timothy Shanahan in Shanahan on Literacy, September 9, 2023; Shanahan can be reached at shanahan@uic.edu.

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2. Restraining the Remediation Impulse and Asking More of Students

(Originally titled "To Address Learning Gaps, Go Deeper")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Baltimore school leader Kristina Kyles-Smith says that as we grapple with post-pandemic learning gaps, we must beware of seven all-too-common remediation pitfalls that may produce temporary gains but end up shortchanging students:

- Skill and drill worksheets and memorization – These don't foster critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and transferring learning to real-world situations.
- A narrow focus on basic skills – Students' exposure to different perspectives is limited and they miss the opportunity to make connections between subjects.
- Decontextualized content – Fragmented, isolated learning experiences lack coherence and applicability.
- Overemphasis on test prep – This narrows the curriculum, limits student engagement, and produces superficial learning.
- Dry, teacher-centered instruction – Student ownership, motivation, and deeper exploration are sacrificed.
- Cultural irrelevance – Failing to connect with students' backgrounds, identities, and lived experiences often means that learning doesn't stick.
- Mistaking students' current skill levels for their intelligence – "This pitfall perpetuates a fixed mindset and limited expectations," says Kyles-Smith, "inhibiting students' ability to reach their full potential and engage in deeper learning experiences."

When these practices take over classrooms, she says, we sell students short – often those about whom educators have lower expectations based on race, social class, or previous performance.

Instead, says Kyles-Smith, when students are behind, educators need to stay focused on first-class instruction, strategically mixing in just-in-time catch-up learning. Some examples:

- Community service work that includes research, interviews, and designing campaigns;
- Drafting business plans for social enterprises using grade-level mathematics;
- Analyzing local or global issues and writing persuasive letters to policymakers.
- Researching a neighborhood problem and proposing specific solutions.

"By delving deeply into challenging content and grappling with complex problems," Kyles-Smith believes, "students develop the resilience, adaptability, and self-directed learning skills necessary to overcome academic setbacks and navigate future challenges."

"To Address Learning Gaps, Go Deeper" by Kristina Kyles-Smith in *Educational Leadership*, September 2023 (Vol. 81, #1, pp. 48-54); Kyles-Smith can be reached at Kristina.ksmith@lilliemay.org,

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3. What's Going On in a Harkness Classroom Discussion?

In this chapter in a book on Harkness teaching, Jim Heal (Wellington College, U.K.) lists the traits associated with discussion-based teaching developed at Phillips Exeter Academy after a 1930 donation from philanthropist Edward Harkness. The gift, which included equipping almost all classrooms with a large oval table in place of individual student desks, aimed to shift the school's pedagogy from recitation (conducted by teachers sitting on raised platforms) to student-centered discussions (guided by the teacher, who sits with students at the table). The Harkness approach revolutionized teaching at Exeter and has been a major influence on classrooms around the world, including Heal's.

Below are the 22 aspirational characteristics of Harkness classes, quoted verbatim (with minor changes in sequence). Might these be helpful criteria for any classroom discussion at the secondary level?

- Students prepare for class by reading, annotating, thinking about, and generating ideas for discussion.
- Students prepare for class by having all materials.
- Students regularly participate without "prompt questions" from the teacher.
- Students refer to the reading/prep during discussion.
- Students use evidence to support their assertions.
- Students stay on topic and help others stay on topic.
- Students incorporate ideas gained from independent reading and thinking into class discussion.
- Students listen closely to the comments of others, considering carefully their points before speaking.
- Students address comments to the class (instead of to the teacher).
- Students refer to the comments of others, using their names.
- Students make eye contact when speaking.
- Students are able to summarize information to make connections between others' points and their own.
- Students are able to make connections between various aspects of course content, and between course content and their own knowledge.
- Students make their voices central to the learning environment.
- Students further the discussion with their input, avoiding repetition.
- Students avoid dominating discussion.

- Students create opportunities for others in the discussion to contribute or make connections to what each is saying.
- Students actively influence the learning of the group.
- Students are willing to ask questions and/or to challenge others constructively to deepen understanding.
- Students stay engaged throughout the discussion, even if they aren't the ones doing the talking.
- Students work with fellow students to find the answers rather than relying on the teacher.
- The course readings and discussions inspire students to find out more through further reading, thinking, and discussion.

"The Harkness Genome Project: The Search to Codify What Makes Harkness Harkness" by Jim Heal in *A Classroom Revolution: Reflections on Harkness Learning and Teaching* (Phillips Exeter Academy, 2015)

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4. Small Steps to Large Goals

(Originally titled "The Someday/Monday Dilemma")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Justin Reich (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) says a perennial challenge for educators is the gap between big-picture, long-range reforms we'd like to make and the fact that on Monday morning, classroom doors open and teachers need to work with their students. "We can't put our schools in drydock," says Reich; "we can only change them while they are under sail. Under most circumstances, teachers can only make a few small changes on any given day."

The answer to this dilemma, he believes, is starting with small changes and then, if they are successful, extending them in a process of continuous improvement. This is the way major improvements have been made in several other arenas in recent years. The first YouTube video was 19 seconds long; the first Kickstarter crowdfunding site was a project funded for $35. Each of these proved to be a "minimum viable prototype," and YouTube and Kickstarter gradually built subscribers, made false steps, incorporated user feedback, made updates, and scaled up.

For schools to engage in this kind of agile development, says Reich, they need to embrace three kinds of change:

• *From straight lines to cycles and spirals* – The problem with linear thinking about improvement is that evaluation is at the end of the process and we often discover halfway through that we misunderstood the problem and need to start all over. Better to start small – with chronic student absenteeism, for example, starting by trying out new ways of reconnecting with just one child or family – and then building out from what works.

• *From comprehensive school plans to short cycles* – "It's incredibly hard to get better at something," says Reich, "if you try it once in September and you don't get another shot at it until the next September. But with a shorter design/evaluation cycle, you can experiment with

what works and what doesn't and not wait for a year. For example, before implementing a new bell schedule, try it out for a week and make tweaks based on feedback. (One thing that almost every school got practice at during the pandemic was trying out different bell schedules.)

• *From individual improvement to community partnerships* – Improving in isolation is difficult, says Reich. "Instead of imagining the improvement of teaching as the solitary quest of individuals, think of improved teaching as a community endeavor" – involving students, colleagues, family members, and the community. For example, teacher teams might experiment with doing more formative classroom assessments or finding ways to include more students with disabilities in mainstream classes.

Reich suggests that as we adopt these new approaches, we should be especially attentive to how marginalized members of our communities are affected – recent arrivals in the U.S., kids who learn differently, students of color. "When we include people on the margins with distinct assets and needs," he says, "we often find our way to designs that particularly benefit targeted students and families while generally benefiting everyone in a community."

"The Someday/Monday Dilemma" by Justin Reich in *Educational Leadership*, September 2023 (Vol. 81, #1, pp. 22-27); Reich can be reached at jreich@mit.edu.

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5. Giving and Getting Candid Feedback in a Diverse Workplace

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Erin Meyer (INSEAD) points to two recent developments in U.S. workplaces: an increased emphasis on candid feedback and an embrace of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Those developments would seem to be compatible, but it turns out that in a diverse workplace, many people tread carefully with feedback – especially if it's not positive. Why? "Because," says Meyer, "the vast majority of people aren't ready to receive criticism unless they feel safe with the person providing it." She has suggestions for feedback across cultures, genders, and generations:

• *Across cultures* – To those in other countries, Americans have a reputation for being blunt and direct, and with criticism, this can lead to hurt feelings and stress for those accustomed to a less direct approach. Meyer's advice: "When it comes to providing feedback internationally, the message is not, 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,' but 'Do unto others as they would have done unto themselves."

• *Across genders* – Research has shown that female leaders are expected to be warm and nice as well as competent and tough. "This line is difficult to walk," she says, "and women who provide frank negative feedback risk being perceived as combative." Then there's "mansplaining" – a man explaining something to a woman who knows more about it than he does – and "manvising" – men giving women advice the recipients have neither asked for nor want. It's true that men give unsolicited advice to other men, and women give plenty of advice to other women, but across genders, there's an imbalance: men are five times as likely to give unrequested advice to women as women are to give it to men.

Studies show that giving feedback provides the person dispensing it emotional power over the person receiving it. The recipient's heart rate speeds up considerably, and the giver

has an elevated feeling of power. Adding gender to this dynamic makes giving advice or feedback especially tricky for men. But history is not destiny, says Meyer, if men keep in mind three A's of feedback:

- The feedback must be intended to *assist* your colleague succeed, not vent frustration.
- The feedback must be *actionable*, geared to helping the recipient improve.
- *Ask* for feedback on your own work before providing it (unless the female colleague specifically asked for feedback, in which case it should be given right away).

• *Across generations* – This came up for Meyer when she had a subordinate who was exactly the same age as her mother. When things were positive, their relationship was fine, but when Meyer had to give corrective feedback, she couldn't figure out "how to avoid coming off as obnoxious." There's a name for this: *status incongruence*, when the status that goes with your role in society doesn't match the part you're currently playing. It was difficult to give the older colleague feedback without seeming to suggest that the person had somehow failed to keep pace.

Further complicating workplace interactions, Meyer points to research generalizations on generational differences in attitudes toward feedback:

- Boomers (in their 70s, 60s, and late 50s) are used to a formal annual performance review from the boss documenting their performance, versus getting more-frequent feedback – or feedback from colleagues.
- Gen Xers (in their 50s and 40s) are less formal than the earlier generation and don't want to wait till the end of the year to know how they're doing; they want constant feedback, and are also accustomed to giving "upward feedback" to the boss.
- Millennials or Generation Y (30s and late 20s) are not, as some believe, fragile "snowflakes" but have high self-esteem and confidence and can handle feedback.
- Zoomers (in their teens to mid-20s) are the first generation to be surrounded by social media and constant informal feedback, posting material online and watching feedback come in all day long. They're more likely to expect to give and receive frequent, real-time feedback – boss to subordinate, subordinate to boss, and peer to peer.

"If you're leading a multigenerational team," says Meyer, "the best way to deal with diverse expectations about feedback is to regularly outline explicit norms for how and when it should be given. That creates a common platform on which all can converge." She suggests building mutual feedback into meetings, perhaps using a protocol or one positive and one suggestion, or *Start, Stop, Continue* (one thing to start doing, one to stop doing, and one thing to continue). Other possibilities:

- One-to-one chats in which team members regularly pair up and share feedback following agreed-upon ground rules;
- A "speed dating" portion of a staff meeting in which pairs spend a few minutes giving mutual feedback and then cycle to the next person;
- A live 360-degree leadership team feedback circle (for mature teams with strong relationships); the lead-off person gets feedback (in front of the group) from the person on their left, they say thank you, then the next person to the left gives feedback, and this

continues around the circle, then the process is repeated for everyone else. At the end, the group thinks about any common themes. Meyer says this can be a powerful and positive group experience.

"If your group is made up of people from a variety of cultures, genders, and generations," she concludes, "getting your employees to give feedback to one another frequently and openly allows each to get myriad ideas for how to improve, pushes the team toward excellence, exposes blind spots, and promotes greater cohesion. That's how you can make sure DEI and radical candor converge rather than collide."

"When Diversity Meets Feedback" by Erin Meyer in *Harvard Business Review*, September/ October 2023 (Vol. 101, #5, pp 86-97); Meyer can be reached at erin.meyer@insead.edu.

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6. Is Over-Managing Kids Driving Them Crazy?

In this *New York Times* article, psychologist Camilo Ortiz (Long Island University) and author Lenore Shenazy (*Free-Range Kids*) describe the increasing protectiveness of U.S. parents, brought on by round-the-clock scary news alerts on cable TV and growing concern about getting kids into good colleges. The result is more adult-supervised activities and indoor screen time and a lot less free-range independence.

"But as kids' freedom has been going down, their anxiety has been shooting up," say Ortiz and Shenazy. "While there could be many reasons our kids are suffering, what if the problem was simply that kids are growing up so overprotected that they're scared of the world? If so, the solution would be simple, too: start letting them do more things on their own."

To help young people grow up more brave and resilient, Shenazy set up the Let Grow Project. Working with schools, a suggested homework assignment is kids asking parents if they can do something new by themselves (or with a friend): walk the dog, run an errand, make breakfast for the family, ride the bus – anything they are capable of doing but haven't done yet. The feedback has been very positive: doing these small things builds kids' confidence and reduces anxiety.

In Ortiz's therapy sessions with young people with anxiety disorder, he has found the same thing. When he asks what cool things they'd like to do on their own, they follow up and there's a strangely liberating effect: kids go from saying they are worried most of the time to worrying only a little. The results so far have been better than medication and cognitive behavioral therapy. Ortiz is doing a larger study to get more-definitive results.

"Giving kids more freedom," conclude Ortiz and Shenazy, "could be the cheapest, fastest, and easiest way to give kids back the bounce they've lost."

"To Help Anxious Kids, Give Them More Freedom" by Camilo Ortiz and Lenore Shenazy in *The New York Times*, September 6, 2023

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7. Books for Students Who Have Seen the Movie *Oppenheimer*

This *School Library Journal* article recommends books aligned with the current film *Oppenheimer*:

- *The Complete Story of Sadako Sasaki and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Sue DiCicco and Masahiro Sasaki, grade 4-6
- *Bomb: The Race to Build – and Steal – the World's Most Dangerous Weapon* by Steve Sheinkin, grade 5 and up
- *Bomb (Graphic Novel): The Race to Build – and Steal – the World's Most Dangerous Weapon* by Steve Sheinkin, illustrated by Nick Bertozzi, grade 5 and up
- *Sachiko: A Nagasaki Bomb Survivor's Story* by Caren Stelson, grade 5-8
- *Soul Lanterns* by Shaw Kuzki, grade 5-8
- *Atomic Women: The Untold Stories of the Scientists Who Helped Create the Nuclear Bomb* by Roseanne Montillo, grade 6-8
- *Pictures from a Hiroshima Schoolyard*, distributed by the Video Project, grade 9 and up

"Beyond the Blockbuster" in *School Library Journal*, September 2023 (Vol. 69, #9, pp. 19-20)

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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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- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
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- The "classic" articles from all 20 years

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Ed (formerly Ed. Magazine)
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education