Marshall Memo 1050

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 26, 2024

In This Issue:

1. David Brooks on understanding and nurturing emotional intelligence
2. Core beliefs that boost student motivation
3. Metacognition and the best study strategies
4. The link between hours in school and student learning
5. Ten ways to use generative AI to improve engagement and learning
6. The role of spelling in teaching phonics – and what about OG?
7. The art of the thank-you note
8. Recommended picture books
9. Short items: (a) Tips for calming down a class; (b) More generative AI suggestions

Quotes of the Week

"Around the world, people love. They sing for love, they dance for love, they compose poems and stories about love. They tell myths and legends about love. They pine for love, they live for love, they kill for love, and they die for love."

Helen Fisher, a biological anthropologist who researched the brain circuitry of passionate affection, died August 17th at 79. Here is the New York Times obituary.

"It can take years to fully realize the impact of a person on your life. Don't let this stop you from expressing your gratitude."

Sally Susman (see item #7)

"Learning, getting better, happens successfully when our brains, through repeated experiences, engage in a good struggle to (a) create or extend an existing neuronal chain, (b) make a neuronal constellation more complex, or (c) hardwire an existing chain so that it fires automatically and becomes sticky. When this happens we acquire knowledge, develop our skills, and deepen our understandings in different ways and over different periods of time."

Martin Skelton in "At Last: A Definition of Learning," in *Looking for Learning*, June 24, 2024

"You will trip up. One day you will find yourself taking a left turn at the corner of Fake Experts and Cherry Picking, or getting stuck at the junction of Person-You-Trust-Says-Something-False-But-Convincing… But that's okay. Dust yourself off, critical thinker. This is all part of your journey."

Seema Yasmin in *What the Fact? Finding the Truth in All the Noise*, 2022, spotted in "Combating Misinformation: Inquiry As a Tool for Civic Literacy" by Chris Hass in *Language Arts*, May 2024 (Vol. 101, #5, pp. 368-370)

"When people get fired, it's rarely because they lack technical abilities; it's almost always because they're uncoachable, they have anger issues, or they're bad teammates. In other words, they lack emotional skills, a fact often undetected in the hiring process."

David Brooks (see item #1)

"My goal is to never write another report from home again and enable other school psychologists to do the same."

Grant Hacherl on his resolve to cut down on after-hours paperwork by using generative AI to write first drafts of reports based on his Excel spreadsheet notes on his students, in *Communiqué*, September 2024 (Vol. 53, #1, p. 40)

---

1. David Brooks on Understanding and Nurturing Emotional Intelligence

In this *New York Times* article, David Brooks says that while I.Q. is a measure of cognitive ability, emotional intelligence – understanding and successfully regulating one's feelings – is just as essential to personal and professional success. "When people get fired," he says, "it's rarely because they lack technical abilities; it's almost always because they're uncoachable, they have anger issues, or they're bad teammates. In other words, they lack emotional skills, a fact often undetected in the hiring process."

The conventional wisdom used to be that our rational side was cool and objective, our emotional side primitive and impulsive. But recent developments in neuroscience have turned that conception on its head, showing how emotions can guide our rational side to be wiser and more effective. "Now we understand that emotion is central to being an effective rational person in the world," says Brooks. "Emotions and reason are one system integral to good decision-making." He describes several ways this can operate:

"Indignation helps us focus on injustice. Awe motivates us to feel small in the presence of grandeur and to be good to others. Euphoria puts us in a risk-taking frame of mind. Happiness makes people more creative, more flexible in their thinking. Disgust primes us to reject immoral behavior. Fear helps amplify our senses and focus attention. Anxiety put us in a pessimistic state of mind, less likely to take chances. Sadness improves memory, helps us make more accurate judgments, makes us clearer communicators and more attentive to fairness."

"The problem," Brooks continues, "is that our culture and our institutions haven't caught up with our knowledge. Today we still live in a society overly besotted with raw brainpower. Our schools sort children according to their ability to do well on standardized tests, slighting the kind of wisdom held in the body that is just as important for navigating life.

A lot of people are estranged from their own inner lives because they don't know how their emotions function."

How can we get a handle on emotional intelligence and do a better job nurturing it in young people? A starting point is the RULER acronym developed by Marc Brackett and his colleagues at Yale for unpacking emotions:

- Recognize
- Understand
- Label
- Express
- Regulate

"I'd love to live in a culture," Brooks concludes, "that could talk about emotions with the appreciation, sophistication, and granularity that they deserve."

"You're Only As Smart As Your Emotions" by David Brooks in *The New York Times*, August 16, 2024; Brooks can be reached at dabrooks@nytimes.com.

Back to page one

2. Core Beliefs That Boost Student Motivation

In this online article, Dave Stuart Jr. says the key to strong student motivation is building five key beliefs. Classrooms may look very different – physically, demographically, pedagogically, teachers' personalities – but if these beliefs are in place, student motivation will be high. "When the heart is all set, the mind is primed for development," says Stuart. "Because the path to the head, it turns out, is through the heart."

• Teacher credibility – *My teachers are good at their job*. Stuart cites John Hattie's finding that classrooms where students believe in their teachers are twice as productive as classrooms where they don't. "The key here," says Stuart, "is sending intentional and consistent signals to our students that we care, that we're competent, and that we're passionate."

• Value – *This work is worth my time; it matters*. Believing in the teacher's competence is not enough, says Stuart. The curriculum has to seem worthwhile to students beyond the classroom, creating a counterculture to peer influences that may denigrate school learning.

• Effort – *I can improve through smart work*. Attributing success to effective effort (versus innate ability) and difficulty and failure to insufficiently strategic effort (versus lack of ability) is key to students committing to do the work that's asked of them.

• Efficacy – *I can succeed at this*. This is closely tied to beliefs about effort. "I believe hard work will pay off and that I can get better as I go," says Stuart, channeling a student. "I work hard with increasing effectiveness; my hard work yields growth (i.e., success); I now more strongly believe hard work will pay off." Teachers need to intervene where negative beliefs undermine effort and efficacy.

• Belonging – *People like me do work like this. I fit in*. "Belonging is all about identity-context fit," says Stuart. That belief answers the unspoken question in so many classrooms about whether a student *belongs*.

Stuart says these five beliefs are closely interrelated, and putting them into action in schools depends on these understandings:

- Educators come to these beliefs primarily through experience, not just from being intellectually convinced.
- Each belief exists on a continuum – for example, from a strong belief in teachers' competence to doubting their capability and caring.
- The beliefs are hierarchical, forming a pyramid with teacher competence as the foundation and belonging as the apex.
- The beliefs vary from classroom to classroom, especially in middle and high schools. It's up to each teacher to nurture them – and for teacher teams to spread the beliefs beyond their individual domains.
- The beliefs are malleable. There has to be strong pushback when a colleague says, "That student is just not motivated."

"The Five Key Beliefs Beneath Student Motivation" by Dave Stuart Jr., August 13, 2024; Stuart can be reached at dave@davestuartjr.com.

Back to page one

3. Metacognition and the Best Study Strategies

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, Jennifer Gonzalez interviews cognitive psychologist Megan Sumeracki (Rhode Island College) on metacognition – *thinking about our own thinking and knowing what we know and don't know*. Many students study hard, believe they've mastered the material, but perform poorly on tests. Their overconfidence is a sign that they don't have a handle on metacognition.

"The problem," says Sumeracki, "is that our monitoring is not always accurate. It's not like we can just sort of open our heads, take a look and see: Is the information there or isn't it? If we ask a group of students, *How well do you think you understand this? Are we good? Can we move on?* their response may or may not be accurate. And so the way to optimize in education is to focus on the ways that we can help our students monitor in a more-accurate way. The more accurate they are, the better those control decisions are."

Sumeracki suggests four ways to help students understand metacognition and study more successfully:

• *Retrieval practice* – This involves students trying to remember something they've studied without having it in front of them – testing themselves with flashcards, trying to write the information on a blank sheet of paper, or explaining it in their own words. Students are often surprised how difficult it is to retrieve information they thought they'd remembered. The good news is that successfully retrieving it – perhaps after more studying – strengthens the memory.

• *Metacognitive check-ins* – Teachers can build students' metacognitive muscles by asking them to rate their understanding before retrieval practice and again after they've tested themselves. If there's a gap, it helps students understand the overconfidence problem and address it.

• *Spaced retrieval* – Trying to recall something from memory hours and days later is a challenge, again revealing knowledge and skill gaps. The sweet spot is when it's challenging but the memory is successfully retrieved. In the zone of *desirable difficulty*, memories are optimally strengthened, which is why spaced retrieval is a highly effective study strategy.

• *Awareness of metacognitive pitfalls* – When they are successful using retrieval practice and spaced review, students learn why conventional study strategies like re-reading and highlighting don't work as well. Even though retrieval practice can feel frustrating and challenges their mental powers, it's far more effective.

"How Metacognition Can Optimize Learning" by Jennifer Gonzalez and Megan Sumeracki in *Cult of Pedagogy*, August 18, 2024; Gonzalez is at gonzjenn@cultofpedagogy.com, Sumeracki at msumeracki@ric.edu.

Back to page one

4. The Link Between Hours in School and Student Learning

In this *American Educational Research Journal* article, Matthew Kraft (Brown University) and Sarah Novicoff (Stanford University) report on their comprehensive analysis of the relationship between time in school and student achievement. In the aftermath of the pandemic, there has been a push for longer school year and days, but Kraft and Novicoff believe it's not a simple matter. Some salient points:

• *Adding school learning time has a positive effect*. "Overall," they say, "the empirical evidence we review establishes a clear positive causal effect of increasing total time and instructional time on student achievement. Estimates are overwhelmingly positive and significant." It appears that bundling additional time with other interventions that maximize the impact of extra time (including data-driven instruction, one-on-one tutoring, and more-effective teacher supervision and coaching) produces the greatest impact.

• *There are wide disparities in total learning time within the nation*. The U.S. has fewer school hours per year than many other countries, and there are wide disparities within the nation. "Millions of public school students in the United States," say Kraft and Novicoff, "will have access to what amounts to 2 years of additional time in school during their K-12 educational career compared to millions of their peers, simply because of where they live." But increasing school hours is challenging because of cost, parent and educator resistance, and other factors, and for a variety of reasons, it's not clear that adding time would narrow SES and racial achievement gaps.

• *There are other ways to get more out of existing school hours*. Kraft and Novicoff reviewed research on several strategies for maximizing active learning time. They find evidence that later start times have a mostly positive impact on learning for older students (as well as health gains), and shifting schedules so students take core subjects early in the day is

also helpful. They also find consistent evidence that a four-day school week almost always has a negative impact on student learning.

• *What matters most is converting total school hours to active learning time.* Kraft and Novicoff describe a number of factors that subtract from the amount of active, engaged learning time within the total school year:

- Lunch, recess, and passing time (necessary, of course for social-emotional learning);
- Snow days, teacher strikes (these days may be made up at the end of the school year, but that time is usually less productive);
- Teacher absences;
- Non-academic classroom activities – taking attendance, transitions;
- Other interruptions to instruction – intercom calls, phone calls and texts to teachers;
- Student disruptions within the classroom;
- Student absences due to illness, suspensions, tardies;
- Classroom time when students are disengaged.

With the last few items on this list, say Kraft and Novicoff, "the amount of active learning time for an individual student is a product of multiple factors, including their own work ethic and internal motivation, the ability of their teachers and schools to motivate their effort, the curriculum, and their peers' behavior."

The most successful school leaders and their teams reduce these erosions – for example, putting a stop to intercom interruptions, improving classroom management, increasing student and teacher attendance – to maximize the amount of active learning every day.

"Time in School: A Conceptual Framework, Synthesis of the Causal Research, and Empirical Exploration" by Matthew Kraft and Sarah Novicoff in *American Educational Research Journal*, August 2024 (Vol. 61, #4, pp. 724-766); Kraft can be reached at mkraft@brown.edu.

Back to page one

5. Ten Ways to Use Generative AI to Improve Engagement and Learning

(Originally titled "Using AI to Fuel Engagement and Active Learning")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Amy Holcombe (High Point University) and Steve "Woz" Wozniak (co-founder of Apple) suggest ways that teachers can use artificial intelligence, combined with human intelligence, to boost student engagement and achievement. Each idea is accompanied by a sample prompt:

• *Gather facts quickly* – Create a content matrix for beavers, nutria, groundhogs, and muskrats that compares their scientific name, physical characteristics, preferred environment, and behaviors.

• *Create accessible content* – Rewrite this passage at a third-grade level; translate this passage from English to Spanish.

• *Craft case studies* – Create three single-paragraph case studies depicting the experiences of the British, French, and Germans following the signing of the Treaty of

Versailles. In each case study, identify the country's main motivations and explain the conflicts they had with each of the other countries.

• *Gamify learning* – Create a Jeopardy board for the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

• *Generate activities* – Generate a list of highly interactive activities that are appropriate for teaching a fourth grader about the causes of day and night and the phases of the moon.

• *Stimulate writing* – Generate a 200-word letter written from the perspective of an atom, asking the Cavendish Laboratory not to be split.

• *Personalize tutoring and test preparation* – Create a match game to teach me the parts of a plant cell.

• *Write songs for learning* – Write a song to the tune of "Happy Birthday" to teach me about Marie Curie.

• *Generate choice boards* – Create a choice board for eighth graders with ten options for mastering the following curriculum standard: Analyze the relationship between trade routes and the development and decline of major empires (e.g., Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Greece. Rome, China, Mughal, Mongol, Mesoamerica, Incas, etc.).

• *Produce plays* – Write a five-page script at a ninth-grade reading level for a play about the Boston Tea Party that presents the perspectives of both the British government and American colonists. Provide stage design tips, costuming, narration, and dialogue for six characters.

Holcombe and Wozniak suggest three rules for being transparent with student and educator use of AI tools:

- Name the AI tool used.
- Note how it was used – for brainstorming, inspiration, revising, or generating content.
- Provide the exact prompt.

"Using AI to Fuel Engagement and Active Learning" by Amy Holcombe and Steve "Woz" Wozniak in *Educational Leadership*, July 2024 (Vol. 81, #9, pp. 16-21); Holcombe can be reached at aholcomb@highpoint.edu.

Back to page one

6. The Role of Spelling in Teaching Phonics – and What About OG?

In this online article, Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/Chicago) says that historically, phonics instruction in the early grades has mostly been print-to-speech: students are taught to identify letters they see on the printed page (or computer screen), link sounds to them, and then sound out letters, blends, and words. "That sequence mirrors the process readers must use during reading," says Shanahan: "Look at the letters and use that information to generate a phonological representation. It seems reasonable to teach students explicitly what we eventually want them to do."

But learning to read and reading aren't the same thing, he continues. Should there be more speech-to-print – having students say words (or hear them in dictation) and then try to spell them? Citing a 1967 paper by Jeanne Chall and several more-recent studies, Shanahan says, "The evidence continues to increase in support of adding speech-to-print to the mix… It's

possible that trying to spell and write words does more to enhance phonemic awareness, and it may somehow make the phonology more prominent or easy to perceive."

Of course the outcome of any good phonics program is students being able to go from print to speech – to read and make meaning of words on the page. "However," he adds, "I think there are real benefits to be derived from activities like invented spelling, spelling instruction, word construction from sounds, and so on – in any phonics program. Speech-to-print activities appear to increase learning."

Is Orton-Gillingham the gold standard for phonics programs, as its supporters believe? Shanahan says the most recent meta-analysis found that "Orton-Gillingham procedures are no more effective than any other explicit systematic phonics instruction – despite the religious fervor of some of its advocates… My advice: get a phonics program that includes [speech-to-print] activities or layer them into a traditional print-to-speech program (including OG)."

"Print-to-Speech or Speech-to-Print? That Is the Question" by Timothy Shanahan in *Shanahan on Literacy*, August 17, 2024; Shanahan can be reached at shanahan@uic.edu.

Back to page one

7. The Art of the Thank-You Note

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Sally Susman (Pfizer, International Rescue Committee) says that when her grandparents gave her a new bicycle, her mother "wouldn't let me out of the house to take it for a spin before I sat down and wrote them a thank-you note." The young Susman grumbled, but she now believes thank-you notes are a "powerful professional tool for leaders." Showing appreciation, she says, engenders "enthusiasm, hard work, and loyalty" and makes an important contribution to a positive professional environment. Susman suggests five ways to optimize their impact:

• *Take time to reflect*. "In matters of the heart, speed is rarely a virtue," she says. "Before you put pen to paper (or thumbs to text), think about what you want the recipient to know, what sentiment you want to linger, and how you hope they will feel after reading it." She sets aside some time on Saturday mornings to ponder and hand-write her notes.

• *Thank those who are often forgotten*. One of Susman's CEO mentors made a point of writing thank-you notes to factory workers and lobby security guards. He once sent a note to Susman's daughter for leaving an origami bird on his desk.

• *Be specific*. "The best notes are detailed," she says, not canned and generic, getting into how the person's actions made a difference for you.

• *Make it matter*. Thank-you notes are especially meaningful when they commend a colleague for making a tough choice – for example, having a difficult conversation and handling it well.

• *It's never too late*. "It can take years to fully realize the impact of a person on your life," says Susman. "Don't let this stop you from expressing your gratitude. Make it part of your routine to consider if there is anyone to whom you owe a thank-you letter."

"5 Tips for Writing Meaningful Thank-You Notes" by Sally Susman in *Harvard Business Review*, August 8, 2024

Back to page one

8. Recommended Picture Books

In this feature in *Language Arts*, Kathryn Will and six colleagues list the books published in 2023 they chose for their "enduring quality" (click the link below for cover images and brief summaries; subsequent Memos will have their picks for novels, non-fiction, and poetry):

Picture books

- *A Bear, a Bee, and a Honey Tree* by Daniel Bernstrom, illustrated by Brandon James Scott
- *Big and Small and In-Between* by Carter Higgins, illustrated by Daniel Miyares
- *Maya's Song* by Renee Watson, illustrated by Bryan Collier
- *My Name is Saajin Singh* by Kuljinder Kaur Brar, illustrated by Samrath Kaur
- *On a Gold-Blooming Day* by Buffy Silverman
- *Skater Cielo* by Rachel Katstaller
- *Tell Me a Lion Story* by Kara Kramer
- *What Are Words Really?* by Alexi Lubomirski, illustrated by Carlos Aponte
- *Wondering Around* by Meg Fleming, illustrated by Richard Jones

"The 2023 Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts" by Kathryn Will, Patrick Andrus, Dorian Harrison, Joyce Herbeck, Laura Hudock, Osha Lynette Smith, and Fran Wilson in *Language Arts*, May 2024 (Vol. 101, #5, pp. 358-367)

Back to page one

9. Short Items:

a. Tips for Calming Down a Class – In this *Edutopia* article, Daniel Leonard suggests almost three dozen ways to bring peace and order to a noisy classroom, from primary grades to high school.

"34 Ways to Quiet a Rambunctious Class" by Daniel Leonard in *Edutopia*, August 18, 2023

Back to page one

b. More Generative AI Suggestions – In this online article, Eric Hudson provides an extensive list of articles for teachers, administrators, and policymakers on using ChatGPT and other AI tools in K-12 schools.

"Back to School with AI: A Playlist for Educators" by Eric Hudson in *Learning on Purpose*, August 8, 2024

Back to page one

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.

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
- Article selection criteria
- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
- Topics (with a count of articles from each)
- Headlines for all issues
- Reader opinions
- 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 (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- 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
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
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
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