Marshall Memo 1099

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 11, 2025

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Quotes of the Week

"Writing is thinking; it is a generative and metacognitive process. Writing is also relational, as writers have to look within themselves to connect with others. AI may make writing more efficient, but efficiency is not the goal. Intellectual challenge is what produces the learning."

Lauren Boulanger in "AI Has Done Far More Harm Than Good in My Classroom" in *Education Week*, August 7, 2025

"Nothing kills a book faster than making it a tool for strategies practice, and nothing is less likely to help students become effective readers."

Doug Lemov, Colleen Driggs, and Erica Woolway (see item #5)

"Picture books aren't just charming artifacts of early childhood or a bulwark against a screen-based life. They are the foundation of literacy, cultural knowledge, and cognitive growth… The stories, vocabulary, and archetypes embedded in picture books provide the background knowledge children need to make sense of more-complex texts later on. In this way, picture books are not just an entry point to literacy; they're a child's first curriculum."

Robert Pondiscio in "Picture Books Lay the Groundwork for Reading Success and Cultural Literacy" in *Education Gadfly*, August 7, 2025

"Just because a book is tiny and its readers are little doesn't mean it can't be perfect. On its own scale, it can be as good as Tolstoy or Jane Austen."

Allan Ahlberg, children's book author (*Each Peach Pear Plum*, *The Jolly Postman*, and many others), who died July 29th at 87. Here is the *New York Times* obituary.

"Culture is rarely dictated; it's cultivated through everyday actions."
Sharon Porter (see item #4)

"Responsibility for great meetings *always* lies with the person who calls them."
Dan Rockwell (see item #8)

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1. Jigsaw Learning – How Well Does It Work?

In this *Review of Educational Research* article, Eva Vives (Ghent University) and six co-authors report on their meta-analysis of jigsaw, a cooperative learning strategy developed in the 1970s by Elliot Aronson and colleagues at the University of Texas (details at the Jigsaw Classroom website). Here is the most common jigsaw sequence:

- The class is divided into groups.
- Curriculum content is split into the same number of segments as students per group.
- For example, with a lesson on Eleanor Roosevelt and 5-student groups: her childhood, family life, life after FDR's polio, as First Lady, and her career after FDR's death.
- In each group, students are assigned different segments and silently study material on it.
- The class reshuffles into "expert groups" for the segments, and each discusses its portion and rehearses how it will be presented back in their home groups.
- The original groups reconvene and each "expert" presents their segment in sequence.
- The teacher circulates to monitor and intervene as needed.
- If all students do their job, each group puts together the jigsaw of the whole lesson.
- All students are assessed on their knowledge of the lesson's content.

Advocates of jigsaw learning believe it has these key attributes: students are more actively involved than in a standard teacher-centered class; every student takes responsibility for curriculum content; students teach each other; students work together to reach the learning goal; and students get practice on collaboration and social-emotional skills.

How effective is jigsaw learning? Vives and her colleagues did a comprehensive review of 40 years of research and found mixed results depending on the curriculum area and how well it was implemented. Their conclusions:

• "The introduction of social interdependence in the classroom," say the researchers, "can have positive effects on both academic and psychological outcomes." Students from elementary grades through college liked jigsaw as a classroom process.

• The most positive academic results were in language arts and social sciences classes, somewhat less positive in STEM and vocational classes. Academic gains from jigsaw lessons were more long-lasting than from standard instruction. A key factor in stickiness seemed to be the "desirable difficulty" involved in the expert phase – the challenge for students being responsible for studying their content, understanding it, and presenting to peers.

• Some studies found that jigsaw resulted in a high cognitive load on students as they studied their portion and presented it to peers. Interestingly, the cognitive load was higher in jigsaw lessons than in a conventionally taught classroom, even though each student was responsible for only a fraction of the lesson content. Learning depended on groupmates' skill at learning and presenting the material.

• Jigsaw lessons had positive psychosocial effects, including students' motivation and feeling of competence. Jigsaw's impact was mixed on boosting student self-esteem and reducing prejudice. Oddly, there has been little research on how well jigsaw lessons developed cooperation skills.

"The jigsaw method," say Vives et al., "confronts students with both a cultural and a cognitive challenge that requires students to learn how to function in such a pedagogical environment, in addition to learning their course materials. Such learning may take time."

That's why jigsaw is challenging for teachers. Many schools don't have a culture of cooperation, and students may not have the social skills to work cooperatively, aren't used to being dependent on one another, and may lack the cognitive skills to take responsibility for a piece of the curriculum and teach it to classmates. Jigsaw lessons were most effective, the researchers found, when teachers took the time to explicitly teach the cooperative and cognitive skills involved in the process.

Vives and colleagues believe jigsaw learning may be especially important as digital tools become more prominent. "Digital technologies," they say, "offer unprecedented opportunities for collaborative learning and real-time support for class management (e.g., forming student groups, monitoring the engagement of learning, deciding when and how to intervene in their learning activities…). However, as sophisticated as they can be, the digital tools in support of collaborative learning methods can only be effective if the methods themselves are well understood and guided by a detailed knowledge of the cognitive and socio-cognitive processes they activate… We have never needed this knowledge so much."

"Learning with Jigsaw: A Systematic Review Gathering All the Pieces of the Puzzle More Than 40 Years Later" by Eva Vives, Céline Poletti, Anaïs Robert, Fabrizio Butera, Pascal Huguet, ProFAN Consortium, and Isabelle Régner in *Review of Educational Research*, June 2025 (Vol. 95, #3, pp. 339-384); Vives can be reached at eva.vives13@gmail.com.

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2. The Key Elements of Assessment for Learning

In this *Review of Educational Research* article, Dustin Van Orman (Western Washington University) and Chad Gotch and Kira Carbonneau (Washington State University)

report on their study of how well schools of education are preparing teachers to use *assessment for learning* (a.k.a. formative assessment). Teachers-in-training are getting a variety of approaches, some more effective than others, and the result is many teachers starting their careers with an incomplete understanding of the importance of formative assessment.

The researchers summarize the key elements of continuous, in-the-moment use of classroom data to improve teaching and learning:

- Lessons and assessments are shaped by learning goals and evidence of student mastery, so that previous, current, and future lessons are in purposeful alignment.
- Goals and criteria for success are shared with students so they know what high-quality work looks like.
- Teachers use and analyze frequent, varied, and meaningful assessments of learning that uncover students' thinking, knowledge, and skills.
- Assessments help teachers and students understand what learning has taken place and decide on next steps.
- Self- and peer assessment (guided by success criteria) take place so students can drive their own development and serve as a resource for classmates.
- Students get specific, descriptive, and actionable feedback so that, in addition to their own perspectives, they can know and apply teachers' perspectives on their efforts and products.
- Approaches to future learning are adapted based on students' strengths and needs.

"Preparing Teacher Candidates to Assess for Learning: A Systematic Review" by Dustin Van Orman, Chad Gotch, and Kira Carbonneau in *Review of Educational Research*, June 2025 (Vol. 95, #3, pp. 427-463); Van Orman can be reached at vanormd2@wwu.edu.

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3. What Deliberate Practice Looks Like

In this *Grading for Growth* article, Robert Talbert connects alternative grading with the idea of deliberate practice, which relates to the description of formative assessment in the article just above. Here's Talbert's breakdown of deliberate practice, which has been shown to be the key to mastery in academic learning, music, and sports:

- Students have a clear idea of what specific elements of their work need improvement.
- Students have a means for targeting those elements – exercises or focused tasks – that address specific issues of performance.
- Those exercises are easy to repeat.
- Students get immediate feedback, not necessarily from the instructor.
- The exercises are incremental, cumulative steps that lead the student toward mastery of the main task.
- There's a recognition that all this is hard work and often not fun. If it feels easy, it's not deliberate practice.

What does this have to do with alternative grading? Talbert says a good grading system is closely tied to deliberate practice – perhaps there's a place to note "evidence of deliberate practice." He suggests reframing homework as "practice," calling active in-class learning "practice time," and rebranding class meetings as "rehearsals."

"Alternative Grading and Deliberate Practice" by Robert Talbert in *Grading for Growth*, August 4, 2025; see Memo 971 for another piece on deliberate practice by Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool.

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4. Leaders Focusing on What They Can Control and Influence

In this *NAESP Communicator* article, Maryland principal Sharon Porter embraces an idea put forward by Stephen Covey in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*: the circles of control and influence in our professional lives. "One of the most transformational habits a school leader can develop," says Porter, "is the ability to pause, reflect, and intentionally reframe their focus… It's a leadership necessity." Her suggestions in each area:

• *The circle of control* – This is what we have direct authority over: how we spend time during the school day; the tone of meetings and other interactions; how we respond to challenges and conflicts; maintaining emotional regulation under pressure; maintaining professional boundaries; seeking and responding to feedback; and everyday routines.

• *The circle of influence* – These are areas where we don't have direct control but can have an impact: staff morale, mindsets, and engagement; student culture and behavior; parent and community trust; PD priorities; and sometimes, district policies. How much influence a leader has is directly linked to consistency, interpersonal skill, connections, and accumulated reputation, credibility, and trust.

• *The circle of concern* – These are things that affect your school but are largely out of your hands: national and state political dynamics; economic inequities within the community; external mandates; a pandemic; and family circumstances that affect students' wellbeing and behavior. "While these concerns are real," says Porter, "dwelling on them drains energy and effectiveness… This mindset shift is not just about protecting your peace; it's about maximizing your power." The result of letting go: less stress, and a stronger school culture.

"Culture is rarely dictated," says Porter. "It's cultivated through everyday actions… Every decision and interaction is an opportunity to reinforce the values of respect, collaboration, and high expectations." Some of the ways school leaders shape school culture:

- Modeling how people treat one another;
- Building systems of support and mentorship;
- Encouraging social-emotional learning and restorative practices;
- Encouraging autonomy and innovation;
- Protecting planning time and eliminating unnecessary meetings;
- Asking for input and being transparent about how decisions are made;
- Celebrating accomplishment and diversity;
- Modeling how mistakes are addressed;

- Hosting regular family forums and sending positive updates to families;
- Responding to concerns with empathy and openness.

"Master Your Circles of Control and Influence in School Leadership" by Sharon Porter in *Communicator*, July 5, 2025

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5. The Case for Having Students Read Whole Books

In this *Edutopia* article, Doug Lemov, Colleen Driggs, and Erica Woolway summarize one of the big ideas in their new book, *The Teach Like a Champion Guide to the Science of Reading* (Jossey-Bass, 2025): students need to read books cover to cover. The unique power of books, they say, is the "idea of the world as a complex place demanding deep understanding." The stories in books grab students' attention and change the way they think about the world. And books build knowledge of ideas that have been transmitted through the ages, providing "velcro" that helps students acquire more knowledge and skills.

Reading classic books can be hard, acknowledge Lemov, Driggs, and Woolway. "They are often old, written in the parlance of a bygone era." But the struggle involved in reading such books is important, they believe; students need to be comfortable making sense of unfamiliar vocabulary, syntax, and ideas. It won't be a good thing if only a small elite can read *The Origin of Species* or the U.S. Constitution: "Complex text is the gatekeeper to future success," they say, "and books are the best source of many of the forms of complexity students require exposure to and experience with."

Lemov, Driggs, and Woolway bemoan the fact that students are doing too much passage-based and skills-focused reading in schools. "Nothing kills a book faster than making it a tool for strategies practice," they say, "and nothing is less likely to help students become effective readers." Nor are they fans of an ELA curriculum in which students choose the core books they read. Given that choice, too few students will read books that are truly great, that help them to see the world differently, that they'll share and discuss with other students.

"We are not talking about limiting students' choice in their independent reading," add Lemov, Driggs, and Woolway. "We are all for encouraging and assigning independent reading beyond what happens in class, and we're all for students choosing what interests them. But in class, in the reading that makes up the core of the curriculum, we think the benefits, in terms of shared experience and motivation to read, are strongly on the side of shared books chosen and curated carefully by teachers." At a time when social media are disconnecting and isolating students, shared reading is one of the best ways to bring students together.

"Ensuring that students read books," the authors conclude, "– excellent books, whole books, together in groups, often aloud to maximize the sense of connection they create – will maximize the chances that they become better readers, more knowledgeable students, and that they come to love and value reading."

"Why Students Should Read Whole Books" by Doug Lemov, Colleen Driggs, and Erica Woolway in *Edutopia*, July 31, 2025

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6. Looking at ADHD As a Personality Trait

In this *Play Makes Us Human* article, Peter Gray argues that, "for most children diagnosed with ADHD, the condition is fundamentally a school adjustment problem." It's not a "disease" or a "disorder" that people either have or don't have, he says, but a personality trait that can exist in people to some degree and vary over time. Impulsiveness is a characteristic that often leads to a diagnosis of ADHD. "Some people," says Gray, "are, by nature, more impulsive than others. On average, boys are more impulsive than girls, which explains why boys get diagnosed with ADHD at much higher rates than girls."

Impulsiveness is closely linked to several other behaviors: easily distractible, inattentive, impatient, restless, unable to tolerate tedium or sit still unless something is really interesting, hyperactive, emotionally reactive, and tending to respond to an arousing situation immediately, emotionally, and overtly. From an evolutionary perspective, says Gray, it's easy to see how early human groups would benefit from having at least one person with these characteristics, super-aware of approaching danger or changes in the environment.

Gray cites a study showing that groups of three middle-school students, at least one of whom had ADHD characteristics, were more likely to solve challenging problems involving insight and logic. This was because the students with ADHD were more likely to come up with novel, outside-the-box ideas.

Recent research, including some reported in a *New York Times* article by Paul Tough (summarized in Marshall Memo 1084) has confirmed these earlier findings, showing that ADHD is highly context-dependent and can come and go through people's lives. The new findings contradict "the claim promoted by drug companies," says Gray, "and by physicians and parent advocacy groups paid by drug companies, that ADHD is a disorder, like diabetes, which you either have or don't have, which must be treated with daily medication."

Researchers were surprised to learn in interviews with young adults with ADHD about conditions in which they thrived:

- Stress and challenge – Intense situations fully occupied their attention, including a firefighter who enjoyed rising to the challenge of responding to an emergency.
- Novelty and multitasking, busy and fast-paced – Many said they thrived in careers and settings requiring nearly continuous mental and physical activity and solving new problems – for example, a hospital obstetrics ward or a busy restaurant kitchen.
- Hands-on, active learning – People with ADHD tend to be doers, not theoreticians. "They learn by doing things," says Gray, "able to focus intently when fixing or building something."
- Intrinsic interest – People with ADHD have no problem focusing on things that interest them, but great difficulty when things seem boring – which includes all too many K-12 classrooms. Intrinsic interest is the key, which can't always be orchestrated following a mandatory school curriculum.
- Divergent versus convergent thinking – People with ADHD are most often good at thinking of things in new ways, while teachers tend to work toward a single correct

solution. Researchers have found a correlation, in the U.S. and other countries, between an increase in ADHD diagnoses and the adoption of mandatory curriculum expectations.

"ADHD Is a Personality Trait, Not a Disorder" by Peter Gray in *Play Makes Us Human*, August 2, 2025

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7. Using ChatGPT to Create a Sub Plan in Ten Minutes

In this *Edutopia* article, Michigan teacher/writer Nicholas Provenzano suggests using a chatbot to perform the pain-in-the-neck task of giving substitutes what they need to keep students working and learning when a teacher is absent. The key, of course, is the prompts. Provenzano has these pointers:

• *Be specific*. A prompt for a high-school ELA lesson: "Turn this 50-minute 9th-grade English lesson plan on *The Monkey's Paw* into a fully detailed sub plan. Break it into a bellringer, introduction, Think-Pair-Share, class discussion, and exit ticket. Add clear timing for each part, include student directions, and provide transitions between segments." The lesson plan is attached to this prompt.

• *Fine-tune*. Click the article link below to see how the Think-Pair-Share was improved with a follow-up request for more structure and guidance for struggling students.

• *Generate helpful notes for the sub*. Here's a prompt: "Write a one-page note for a substitute who will be teaching this *Monkey's Paw* lesson. Include class routines, where to find materials, behavior expectations, how to handle tech issues, and which students can help with questions."

• *Fine-tune*. Click the article link again to see how this was improved by a follow-up prompt.

• *Ask for worksheets and other materials*. A suggested prompt: "Create student-facing materials for this lesson plan, including a printable version of the bellringer, discussion questions for Think-Pair-Share, and a one-sentence exit ticket prompt with a simple four-point rubric. Make sure everything is easy for students to follow independently."

• *Follow up*. Click the article link to see Provenzano's suggestions to ChatGPT and the improved materials it generated.

"The whole process," he concludes, "using the better prompts from start to finish, took under five minutes. Let's add five minutes to adjust any part of the sub notes that were not accurate, and you have a sub plan with an adjusted lesson plan, sub notes, and a student handout ready to send to school in under ten minutes. When you are not feeling your best or you have to take care of someone else, ten minutes to create something that ensures your students don't miss a beat and are ready for your return is a huge win."

"Setting Up the Right Prompts to Get an Effective AI-Generated Sub Plan" by Nicholas Provenzano in *Edutopia*, May 30, 2025

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8. Meetings That Aren't a Waste of Time

"Responsibility for great meetings *always* lies with the person who calls them," says Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*. "Lousy meetings make people wish they had a root canal scheduled." His pointers:

- Invite only the people who need to be there, and encourage them to come prepared.
- Minimize the number of agenda items, avoiding routine bureaucratic time-wasters.
- Make meetings a safe space for discussion and ideas.
- Minimize the words in PowerPoint slides and don't read them verbatim.
- Avoid calling on people like it's a middle-school math class.
- Don't monopolize the meeting; get people talking to each other.
- Be open to exploring new ideas that might work.
- Make decisions and reach closure.
- End on time.
- Follow up.

"How to Run Lousy Meetings" by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, August 8, 2025; Rockwell can be reached at dan@leadershipfreak.com.

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9. An Introduction to Algospeak

In this *New York Times* article, Callie Holtermann reports on *algospeak*, Generation Z's argot currently bouncing around online. In an interview with Adam Aleksic, a young linguist who has become a go-to expert on current slang (he shares videos on social media as Etymology Nerd), Holtermann compiled a list of some common algospeak terms and their definitions:

- Aura – coolness and confidence in social situations
- Brain rot – mental deterioration from social media consumption
- Cooked – exhausted, used-up, past saving
- Delulu – short for delusional (from K-pop)
- Gyat – butt
- Looksmaxxing – improving one's appearance
- Lowkey – somewhat, to a minor extent
- Mid – low-quality or disappointing
- Ohio – anything random or unexpected
- Preppy – colorful, trendy clothing
- Rizz – charisma
- Seggs – sex (spelling designed to dodge TikTok's restrictions)
- Sigma – an independent, confident guy
- Skibidi – a gibberish word coined by the YouTube series, *Skibidi Toilet*
- Unalive – a euphemism for suicide

- Yapping – speaking at length about something unimportant

"He'll Translate the Latest Slang for You" by Callie Holtermann in *The New York Times*, July 27, 2025

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10. Recommended Monster Books

In *School Library Journal*, Brigid Alverson recommends seven recent monster tales with themes of empathy, identity, and the unknown:

- *The Cryptid Club* by Michael Brumm, illustrated by Jeff Mack, grade 1-5
- *Yelp! Yeti! Chaos in Kathmandu* by Sneha Pradhan, illustrated by Promina Shrestha, K-grade 4
- *Lizard Boy 2: The Most Perfect Summer Ever* by Jonathan Hill, grade 3-7
- *Creature Clinic* by Gavin Aung Than, grade 3-7
- *My Sister the Werebeast* by Alina Tysoe, grade 3-7
- *The Land of Unfinished Dreams* by Marco Ventura, illustrated by Marco Ferraris, grade 4-7
- *Who Killed Nessie? The Mystery of the Loch Ness Monster* by Paul Cornell, illustrated by Rachael Smith, grade 10 and up

"Cryptids and Critters" by Brigid Alverson in *School Library Journal*, August 2025 (Vol. 71, #8, pp. 34-36)

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11. Free Online Math Materials

In a sidebar in her editor's letter in *Mathematics Teacher*, Suz Antink gives links to free math materials from the Math Learning Center:

- Story collections for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten
- Problem solving story boxes for pre-kindergarten to grade 2
- Concept Quests for grades 2-5
- Problems of the Week for PreK to 12

"Looking Forward to a New School Year" by Suz Antink in *Mathematics Teacher*, August 2025 (Vol. 118, #8, pp. 586-587)

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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 54 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers early Tuesday (there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTMI version. Artificial intelligence is not used.

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