Marshall Memo 1052

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 9, 2024

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Time management is self-management."
Dan Rockwell (see item #9)

"To truly focus during class, students needed to be separated from their phones and constant notifications."
Matthew Kay (see item #5)

"Gathering and playing with others leaves your heart full – a feeling experienced by many people who have played in an orchestra or band, or who have been part of a dance group, theatrical production, or sports team."
Pat LaClair and Lindsey Halman (see item #8)

"Compassion is a sense of concern for the suffering of others and an aspiration to see that suffering relieved."
Tyler Miller, Emiliana Rodríguez, Cyntia Barzelatto, Nascira Ramia, and Christina Hinton (see item #2)

"If students are not thinking, they're not learning."
Peter Liljedahl (quoted in item #1)

"If we really want to have students learning through problem solving, then they have to get stuck, and they have to think, and they have to get unstuck."
Peter Liljedahl (*ibid*.)

1. The Nuts and Bolts of Implementing "Thinking Classrooms"

In this *Mind/Shift* article, Kara Newhouse interviews Staci Durnin, a sixth-grade math teacher in Mineola, New York who read Peter Liljedahl's book, *Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics* in the summer of 2023 and decided to try his approach after 29 years teaching with the conventional model. She loved the new approach and says that her students attained a much deeper understanding of mathematics than in previous years. Durnin reports that the transition involved a lot of work adapting lesson plans, but she got support from a 66,000-member Facebook group and it was all worth it. (Click the article link for an interview with Durnin and other teachers who implemented the approach during the 2023-24 school year.)

Newhouse's article summarizes key elements of the "Thinking Classroom" approach. In 15 years of research, Liljedahl found that in the canonical *I DO, YOU DO, WE DO* math lesson, few students are thinking; rather, they're *mimicking* the teacher. This is a problem, he says, because "if students are not thinking, they're not learning." Most of the so-called problem-solving in math classes, he believes, hasn't been successful in getting students to think. "If we really want to have students learning through problem solving, then they have to get stuck, and they have to think, and they have to get unstuck."

Here's how a Thinking Classroom lesson addresses this perennial problem of low intellectual engagement in math classes, often accompanied by *I'm not a math person* beliefs among many students:

- The teacher gives a 3-5-minute introduction reviewing key background knowledge.
- Students are randomly assigned to groups (two students per group in the primary grades, three in grade 3 and above).
- Students see the random selection process in action, which makes them more likely to participate actively in their group and get to know all their classmates.
- All groups work on the same challenging problem standing up at erasable whiteboards.
- Each group has one marker, and when a student has an idea, another student in the group writes it on the whiteboard.
- The teacher circulates observing students' progress, asking questions, providing vocabulary, giving hints and prods, and differentiating appropriately.
- Students are encouraged to look at the strategies used by other groups, sometimes taking a "gallery walk" around the classroom.
- The class convenes to consolidate key learnings, with the teacher drawing attention to successful solutions and common errors on the boards, providing more-direct instruction, and giving the bigger picture.

- Meaning-making during group work is messy, says Liljedahl, but it's pulled together and made neater in this whole-group discussion.
- Students write key insights in notebooks for their "future forgetful selves."
- Students then get up and, in different groups, move around the room solving shorter problems that check for understanding at the "mild," "medium," or "spicy" level of difficulty.
- Each day's problem gets a little harder, moving in "thin slices" through the curriculum.

Liljedahl has found that most students need several lessons of less serious math problems to warm up to the new format before launching into the regular curriculum. "What that does," he says, "is it makes math fun, and it makes math feel achievable and enjoyable. And it can be very disarming for students."

Collaboration within groups is a key success factor in Thinking Classrooms, he says: "What we noticed was that real collaboration doesn't actually begin until students care as much about their partners' learning as their own learning. And when empathy is unlocked, so many things work better in a classroom."

"How to Get Kids Thinking Instead of Mimicking in Math Class" by Kara Newhouse in *Mind/Shift,* August 27, 2024; see Memo 1013 for examples of Thinking Classroom problems at the elementary, middle-school, and high-school level, and Memo 992 for a summary of the first three chapters of Liljedahl's book.

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2. Fostering Compassion and Compassionate Action in Schools

In this article in *ElementsEd*, Tyler Miller (34GiGs), Emiliana Rodríguez (Made for Joy), Cyntia Barzelatto (Boston University), Nascira Ramia (Universidad San Francisco de Quito), and Christina Hinton (Research Schools International) report on their study of how compassion can be nurtured in schools. Their definition:

> *Compassion is a sense of concern for the suffering of others*
> *and an aspiration to see that suffering relieved*.

The authors interviewed students about what led to compassionate action. "Our goal," say Miller, Rodríguez, Barzelatto, Ramia, and Hinton, "was to understand the common processes through which young people learn to be compassionate so that educators can intentionally support those learning pathways" – and to better understand possible obstacles.

What emerged was the Compassion Learning Spiral, with four stages: recognition of suffering, evaluation, action, and unfolding. Students' positive or negative experiences at each stage expanded or decreased their capacity for compassionate action. The details:

• *Stage 1: Recognition of suffering* – This was clearly a prerequisite for compassionate action. Students described seeing a friend experiencing physical or psychological pain, also situations where they believed compassion wasn't warranted or where being preoccupied with their own problems blinded them to suffering in others. The researchers found that students from more-advantaged families underestimated distress and suffering in others, while those at the opposite end of the economic spectrum were more sensitive to it.

• *Stage 2: Evaluation* – Assessing a situation involved asking (a) How relevant is the suffering person to me and my goals or ideals, perhaps a family member or friend? (b) Does this person deserve a negative outcome? and (c) Is the person able to cope with the situation without undue expense or risk? Evaluation may or may not result in compassionate action – especially if students don't know the person, the person seems undeserving, or intervening might involve personal danger.

• *Stage 3: Action* – The evaluation stage often led students to compassionate action, but it also produced inaction. One student described his decision not to give money to a man begging on the street when he lit up a cigarette and seemed less deserving.

• *Stage 4: Unfolding* – This is the impact of compassionate action (or inaction) on students' long-term sense of self and their disposition to act compassionately in the future. One student described how he saw a little boy lost in a public space, remembered being lost himself, took the boy by the hand, comforted him, and felt good about the whole experience. "Sometimes when people attempt to act compassionately," say the authors, "it doesn't go well. How do they process that, and how does that present an obstacle to their future actions?"

What are the practical applications of these findings for K-12 educators interested in nurturing compassion in their schools? Miller, Rodríguez, Barzelatto, Ramia, and Hinton suggest these steps:

- Create a shared language by introducing adults in the school to the stages of compassion.
- Use everyday situations in the cafeteria, hallways, and other public places to discuss, practice, and reflect on compassionate action.
- Help students become more attuned to suffering in others through journaling.
- Use dilemmas and case studies to discuss situations where deciding to act is not straightforward.
- Discuss fiction and nonfiction stories where characters take compassionate action or refrain from doing so, and ask students to reflect on what they would have done.
- Model compassion directly, drawing attention to situations where adults in the school community act in ways that exemplify compassion.

All these steps, conclude the authors, "can help normalize and cultivate the development of skills like compassion in students' everyday lives, and can underline the need for consistent practice and reflection."

"The Compassion Learning Spiral" by Tyler Miller, Emiliana Rodríguez, Cyntia Barzelatto, Nascira Ramia, and Christina Hinton in *ElementsEd*, August 2024 (Issue 2, pp. 20-37)

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3. The College Essay As a Crucible of Craft, Creativity, and Revelation

In this *New York Times* article, Nell Freudenberger says that volunteering as a writing tutor in New York City high schools, she's come to believe that college essays "provide an opportunity to learn precision, clarity, and the process of working toward the truth through

multiple revisions… Students learn to choose language carefully and to be suspicious of the first words that come to mind… Essay writing teaches prospective [college] students an increasingly urgent lesson: that choosing their own words over ready-made phrases is the only reliable way to ensure they're thinking for themselves."

For many students, the first hurdle is figuring out what to write about. "Either their upbringing hasn't supplied them with several hundred words of adversity," says Freudenberger, "or worse, they're afraid that packaging the genuine trauma they've experienced is the only way to secure their future." The advice of a college counselor: "Keep it brief and show how you rose above it."

A boy Freudenberger tutored said nothing interesting had happened in his life. What about a family member, a favorite school subject, a summer job, hobbies? The boy looked up from his phone and said shyly, "I like to box." Bingo. "I've had this experience with reluctant writers again and again," says Freudenberger, "when a topic clicks with a student, an essay can unfurl spontaneously."

She never gets tired working with students on their essays because each one is different and some reveal extraordinary experiences. Teens are ideal writers, Freudenberger believes, because they are mostly free of preconceptions about writing, eschew "literary" language and hypocrisy, overshare, ask personal questions, push back on adult cluelessness, and "have yet to put down their best stories in a finished form." The short, rigid form of the college essay, she says, "sometimes makes an emotional story even more powerful… less like love than limerence: one-sided, obsessive, idiosyncratic but profound, the first draft of the most personal story their writers will ever tell."

"The College Essay" by Nell Freudenberger in *The New York Times*, May 19, 2024

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4. Sensible Limits on Test Retakes

In this *Edutopia* article, Sarah Morris (University of Arkansas) says that when students are allowed to take the same test multiple times, teachers are saddled with complicated logistics and extra correcting time. In addition, there can be pushback on equity grounds (what about the students who studied hard and did well the first time around?), and allowing retakes can create a perverse incentive for students not to do their best work the first time around.

Morris acknowledges there are situations where students legitimately need another chance to show what they've learned – perhaps an anxiety attack or a distracting situation at home. Here are her suggestions for a middle ground:

• *Set a limit of two retakes for formative and summative tests*. "This policy," she says, "not only accommodates students with test anxiety by offering a second chance, but also maintains the integrity of the assessment process."

• *Limit retakes to students scoring below mastery*. Students who scored 95% might want to boost their score to 100, but catering to perfectionistic students cannot be the teacher's priority, says Morris. She suggests allowing retakes only for students scoring below 3 on a 4-

point scale or below 85 on a 100-point scale. “This allows students below the proficiency mark a chance for improvement,” she says, “ensuring that retakes fulfill their purpose of supporting those who benefit most.”

• *Require students to put in extra work before retakes*. Morris heard about a student who retook a test four times in the same class period – ridiculous. She believes students must use a study guide, take part in a review session, or write a reflection on what in their first attempt needs improvement. “This approach not only prepares them for retakes,” she says, “but also deepens their understanding and retention of the material.”

Morris concludes: “By setting limits, homing in on true skill development, and requiring that extra bit of effort before a retake, we’re not just keeping things orderly – we’re championing a learning environment that’s as fair as it is effective.”

“How Many Retakes Should Students Get?” by Sarah Morris in *Edutopia*, March 14, 2024

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5. High-School Teachers Decide Enough Is Enough with Cellphones

(Originally titled “A Classroom Without Cellphones”)

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, Philadelphia teacher Matthew Kay says that for years, he had a two-strikes policy on cellphone use in class. He told students that using a cellphone for other than academic purposes was not allowed. If he saw a violation, he would give a nonverbal warning, and if the student used a phone again he would put out his hand and expect it to be given to him without argument, to sit on Kay’s desk for the rest of the period. This approach, he says, “felt like a kind, measured, and human way to handle the issue.”

But in recent years, especially since the pandemic, violations increased, took up more and more class time, and had a noticeable effect on the amount of work students got done. Last spring, Kay and his ninth-grade team decided, “To truly focus during class, students needed to be separated from their phones and constant notifications.” Parents raised no objections (“Finally!” was the consensus), and on May 1st, teachers began collecting turned-off phones at the beginning of class and returned them at the end.

Students complied (grumpily at first) and there was an immediate change. “It was great!” says Kay. “Students’ production during work periods went back to what I was seeing from 2006-2016. I was also able to hold on to much more of my classroom management capital, as almost none of our interactions were about managing (and taking) students’ phones.” Student-to-student free-time interactions also improved, says Kay, and the change “has me more excited about 2024-25 than I have been about a school year in a long time.”

“A Classroom Without Cellphones” by Matthew Kay in *Educational Leadership*, September 2024 (Vol. 82, #1, pp. 66-67); Kay can be reached at mrkay@notlight.com.

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6. Fixing Student Misconceptions About Evolution

In this *Edutopia* article, high-school science teacher Mike Delmont says that an accurate understanding of the concept of evolution is essential to making sense of biology, physiology, ecological relationships, and more. Unfortunately, many people don't fully understand evolution, and according to surveys, slightly under one-half of U.S. adults don't accept the idea at all. When asked for a definition, the most common response is that evolution is *change over time*.

This simplification, says Delmont, contains the misconception that an individual can evolve and doesn't capture how evolution operates in the natural world. The way the word is commonly used can also mislead people about the true biological process. People might say that a politician's views evolve over time, or that a Pokémon wooper evolves into a quagsire. Delmont once heard a student say the Grand Canyon was an example of evolution because of how it had changed over the eons.

To combat misconceptions and foster a better understanding of evolution, Delmont believes we need a better bumper sticker definition. The challenge is finding one that's accurate, not too technical, and "sticky" in students' long-term memory. Charles Darwin wrote about "descent with modification" and biology textbooks mention "change in the genotype of a population over generations." Those are not very sticky, but Delmont draws on them for a new definition: *Evolution is the change of a population over generations*. Some advantages:

- The word *population* helps students understand that it's not individuals that evolve.
- The word population also clarifies that it's living things (not the Grand Canyon) that evolve.
- By specifying that the process occurs *over generations*, it's doubly clear that it's not individuals that evolve, and also that small changes from one generation to the next, not just species changes, constitute evolution.
- Saying that evolution occurs over generations implies it involves heritable changes in genes, opening the door to a fuller discussion of genetics in high-school classes.

This modified definition is much stronger, says Delmont, "while still remaining simple enough for students to remember easily."

"Teaching Students a More-Precise Definition of Evolution" by Mike Delmont in *Edutopia*, August 27, 2024

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7. Links Between Elementary Math Achievement and Classroom Behavior

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Jiyung Hwang (Drake University), Jiwon (Lexi) Hwang (California State University/Los Angeles), Jessica Rodrigues (University of Missouri), and Min-Kyung Han (Daegu University) report on their study of the chicken-and-egg relationship between elementary students' math achievement and their classroom discipline problems. Did poor achievement in mathematics lead to behavior issues, did problems with self-regulation create difficulties learning math – or was there a reciprocal, bi-directional relationship between the two?

Looking at academic and behavior data on 15,310 students from kindergarten through grade 5, the researchers found that (a) students' math achievement and behavioral profiles, for better or worse, tended to be quite consistent through the grades, and (b) low achievement in math by third grade predicted problems with both math and behavior in fourth grade, and this negative cycle was repeated as students moved to fifth grade. These findings have two implications, say Hwang, Hwang, Rodrigues, and Han:

• First, it's vital to intervene early with students having difficulty with math and behavior in the early grades before this dynamic kicks in. "The critical importance of early math intervention is particularly true," say the authors, "given the nature of math, where content and skills generally progress hierarchically." If students don't get help early on, "it will become more difficult to break the vicious cycle that negatively affects both math and behavioral outcomes."

• Second, in many cases, difficulties with behavior may be prevented or reduced by addressing math difficulties in the early grades. "It is important for educators to acknowledge," say the authors, "that math and behavioral difficulties are co-occurring and interrelated factors that need to be considered together."

"A Cross-Lagged Analysis of the Relationship Between Math Achievement and Behavioral Outcomes of At-Risk Students" by Jiyung Hwang, Jiwon (Lexi) Hwang, Jessica Rodrigues, and Min-Kyung Han in *Elementary School Journal*, September 2024 (Vol. 125, #1, pp. 151-176)

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8. Alternatives to Bellicose Metaphors in Schools

(Originally titled "Why Do We Use War Metaphors to Talk About Teaching?")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Pat LaClair and Lindsey Halman (UP for Learning) say they're struck by how often educators use wartime metaphors for their work:

- Clad in armor
- Boots on the ground
- In the trenches
- Lead the charge
- Attack problems
- Hit targets

"Metaphors are not just linguistic devices," say LaClair and Halman. "They help us visualize and convey our mental models, the stories we tell ourselves to help us interpret the world. Ultimately these prevalent metaphors reflect a vision of education that is deficit-focused and backwards-facing." Some possible alternatives:

• *Education as sustainable agriculture* – Using this mental model, we might think about schooling as a connected, productive ecosystem in which teachers, students, administrators, and families are all "cultivators of community."

• *Education as a neighborhood garden* – In this metaphor, say LaClair and Halman, "all members share their tools, techniques, and love for gardening with one another. The result

is a project rooted in community, where creative problem-solving and curiosity are key, and where everyone has a stake in the outcome."

• *Education as a symphony orchestra* – With this mental model, say the authors, "collaboration is key to success, and individuals are engaged and motivated to hone their craft not just for their own recognition, but also to uphold their accountability to their fellow musicians… Gathering and playing with others leaves your heart full – a feeling experienced by many people who have played in an orchestra or band, or who have been part of a dance group, theatrical production, or sports team."

"Why Do We Use War Metaphors to Talk About Teaching?" by Pat LaClair and Lindsey Halman in *Educational Leadership*, September 2024 (Vol. 82, #1, pp. 66-67)

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9. Seven Time Management Tips

"Time management is self-management," says Dan Rockwell in this *Leadership Freak* article. "Your time belongs to you." Here are his suggestions for staving off "time vampires" that can suck the life out of a day:

• Pause before launching into a time-consuming task and consider its purpose and alignment with priorities.

• Jot notes on "time donations" – the people you're spending time with, how much, and why. Are they wise time investments?

• Schedule a self-check at the end of each day: Are you happy with the way you spent time? Any pointers for tomorrow?

• Set a no-distraction timer for 25 minutes (the Pomodoro Technique), focus only on the task at hand, then take a five-minute break.

• Start each day with a list of the top three, goal-oriented "big rocks" you want to accomplish and force them into your calendar.

• Schedule your top actions for next week before it begins.

• Have a response ready when someone or something shows up ready to waste your time. What will you say or do?

"Time Management: Become a Vampire Killer" by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, August 29, 2024; Rockwell can be reached at dan@leadershipfreak.com.

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10. Recommended 2023 Nonfiction and Poetry Books for Young People

In this feature in *Language Arts*, Kathryn Will and six colleagues list the nonfiction and poetry books published in 2023 they chose for "enduring quality" (click the link below for cover images and brief summaries):

Nonfiction

- *Blue: A History of the Color As Deep As the Sea and As Wide as the Sky* by Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond, illustrated by Daniel Minter
- *Caves* by Nell Cross Beckerman, illustrated by Kalen Chock
- *Copycat: Nature-Inspired Design Around the World* by Christy Hale
- *Going Places: Victor Hugo Green and His Glorious Book* by Tonya Bolden, illustrated by Eric Velasquez
- *I Am Ruby Bridges: How One Six-Year-Old Girl's March to School Changed the World* by Ruby Bridges, illustrated by Nikkolas Smith
- *Seen and Unseen: What Dorothea Lange, Toyo Miyatake, and Ansel Adams's Photographs Reveal About the Japanese American Incarceration* by Elizabeth Partridge, illustrated by Lauren Tamaki

Poetry

- *Ain't Burned All the Bright* by Jason Reynolds, illustrated by Jason Griffin
- *Ice Cycle: Poems About the Life of Ice* by Maria Gianferrari, illustrated by Jieting Chen
- *Moving Words About a Flower* by K.C. Hayes, illustrated by Barbara Chotiner
- *Out of This World: Star-Studded Haiku* by Sally Walker, illustrated by Matthew Trueman

"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)

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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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- A free sample issue

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- 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