Marshall Memo 1040

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
June 10, 2024

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"The most expensive degree is the one you don't complete."
Arne Duncan (quoted in item #1)

"Students must not only be *able* to read well, but they must also *want* to read and spend time doing it."
Lorilynn Brandt, Douglas Gardner, and Sarah Clark (see item #2)

"I was often perplexed by how my students could have made it to sixth, seventh, or eighth grade without ever having learned how to read fluently or even crack the alphabetic code with automaticity."
Sarah Yost (see item #9)

"Students often ignore the painstaking feedback that their teachers already give them on their essays. Why should we think students will pay attention to feedback if they start getting it from a machine?"
Jill Barshay in "AI Writing Feedback 'Better Than I Thought,' Top Researcher Says," in *The Hechinger Report*, June 3, 2024; Barshay is a barshay@hechingerreport.org.

"Part of teaching well is teaching students to choose a path that is steep and rocky, that they will sometimes complain about. It's a long way up and perhaps others appear to be on what seems like an easier path, even if it does not lead to the summit. The steeper path involves not just harder work but *psychologically* harder work – for teacher as much as student… It is helpful to think of whom we serve in education. We serve the version of our students looking

back on their schooling ten or fifteen years later, in light of its long-run effect on their lives. And we serve their parents, who are counting on us to push their children to create a future for themselves even in a world that surrounds them with distractions and messages that it's OK, cool even, not to do the things now that will create opportunity later."

Doug Lemov in *Teach Like a Champion 3.0* (pp. xxxi-xxxii)

"I have spent the last few years talking to boys as research for my new book, as well as raising my own three sons, and I have come to believe the conditions of modern boyhood amount to a perfect storm for loneliness. This is a new problem bumping up against an old one. All the old deficiencies and blind spots of male socialization are still in circulation – the same mass failure to teach boys relational skills and emotional intelligence, the same rigid masculinity norms and social prohibitions that push them away from intimacy and emotionality. But in screen-addicted, culture war-torn America, we have also added new ones."

Ruth Whippman in "Boys Get Everything, Except the Thing That's Most Worth Having" in *The New York Times*, June 5, 2024

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1. Is College Worth It?

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Phillip Levine (Wellesley College) and Luke Pardue (Aspen Institute) say that in recent years, three arguments have been made calling the value of a college education into question:

- The college wage premium is illusory.
- The lifetime wealth advantage for college graduates is disappearing.
- The risk of investing in college has increased.

So is college worth it? Here is Levine's and Pardue's analysis:

• *Cost-benefit* – Going to college is an investment decision, and the investment will be worth it if the benefits outweigh the costs – and the risks. College is not for everyone, say the authors, but by and large, "The benefits of college tend to be large." The wages of college-educated workers are considerably higher than those with only a high-school diploma.

• *Value added* – But is that because kids with more earning potential self-select and go to college? Correlation doesn't mean that college *causes* higher wages. "Economists have dedicated extensive effort to answering that question," say Levine and Pardue. "The results unambiguously indicate that most, if not all, of the wage premium is caused by going to college." There are differences among types of college: at public four-year institutions, a degree provides a positive return for most students; at private institutions, the average return is high, but there are variations, especially at for-profits.

• *Lifetime earnings and wealth* – In recent years, the net worth of recent college graduates isn't that much higher than high-school graduates – but this may be because the college grads haven't yet reached the point where the full potential of a degree kicks in.

• *Majors* – Students who graduate with business and STEM degrees make more, on average, than those in the "softer" subjects. Dropping out of college has the worst return. As former education secretary Arne Duncan put it, "The most expensive degree is the one you don't complete." Colleges need to make greater efforts, say the authors, to support students who are struggling for academic and financial reasons.

• *Affordability* – To many families, sticker prices make college seem out of reach, even though there is significant assistance for middle- and lower-income students. What really matters is the *net price*. "Colleges need to do a better job telling students the truth about how much they will pay," say Levine and Pardue. "We should make it possible for students and families to access accurate information that would enable them to make wise choices."

• *Non-financial benefits* – A college education does more than boost income and wealth, they say. It gives graduates skills to navigate life, find new jobs, adapt to changing technology, increase colleagues' productivity in the workplace, increase healthy behaviors (including not smoking), decrease criminality, lengthen lifespan, and boost civic participation.

"We do a disservice to students, their families, and society more broadly by focusing on the question of whether college is worth it," conclude the authors. "For the most part, the answer is yes."

"Yes, College Is 'Worth It'" by Phillip Levine and Luke Pardue in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 7, 2024 (Vol. 70, #20, pp. 40-41); Levine can be reached at plevine@wellesley.edu.

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2. Can Extrinsic Rewards Boost Students' Motivation to Read?

"Students must not only be *able* to read well, but they must also *want* to read and spend time doing it," say Lorilynn Brandt and Sarah Clark (Brigham Young University) and Douglas Gardner (Utah Valley University) in this article in *The Reading Teacher*. "Students can learn the skills and strategies of reading, but without the motivation to read, students may never reach their full potential as lifetime literacy learners."

What fosters a desire to read? Motivation is a combination of cultural, social, and individual factors, say Brandt, Clark, and Gardner, leading people to pursue or avoid challenging tasks. When readers are motivated, they find it useful and rewarding, enjoy talking about what they read, and do better on standardized reading tests. But studies show that reading motivation steadily declines during students' K-12 years, especially among students who are having difficulty and make unfavorable comparisons to classmates who are more proficient. Eagerness to read is also undermined when students are asked to read material that doesn't interest them.

To overcome these tendencies, some teachers use rewards to motivate students, and goodies like candy, food, cash, and free time seem to work. But the gains don't last, and

extrinsic rewards like these don't foster the kind of intrinsic motivation that will lead to students wanting to read for its own sake. What's more, there's research showing that over time, extrinsic rewards can actually undermine intrinsic motivation.

Brandt, Clark, and Gardner explored reading motivation in two elementary schools in the western U.S., in particular whether the *type* of extrinsic reward might influence students' intrinsic desire to read. They began by conducting four 1-hour PD sessions with teachers on motivation and rewards:

- Teachers read and discussed research articles on reading motivation.
- The researchers presented some key principles of motivation – authenticity, choice, collaboration, challenge, control, technology – and the idea that *proximal* rewards (closely related to reading) might be effective. Teachers were initially skeptical that rewarding students with *more* reading would work, especially with struggling readers, and were reluctant to give up the kinds of extrinsic rewards they'd been using.
- Teachers brainstormed different kinds of proximal rewards.
- Teachers completed individual plans for implementing proximal rewards.

The researchers then observed as teachers tried out their ideas, gathering data on changes in students' and teachers' behavior and attitudes.

What did they find? With proximal rewards closely related to reading, students' reading motivation and engagement improved – and so did teachers' enjoyment and effectiveness. Teachers changed their minds, gradually embracing the idea that rewarding reading with more reading really worked. At first, teachers thought that giving students a book was as far as they would go with proximal rewards, but they stretched that to include other principles of motivation:

- Authenticity – the book was of interest to the student;
- Choice – students got to pick the book;
- Collaboration – students got to read the book with friends;
- Control – students got to share personal responses with peers and parents.

"Infusing many elements of motivation into the book reward," say Brandt, Clark, Gardner, "makes it both proximal to the reading task and desired by students."

Here are the ways teachers ended up rewarding students who completed reading assignments and met individual and class goals:

- Those students were able to choose a book from an upcoming book order.
- They earned raffle tickets for a monthly drawing for a new class-selected book.
- They could be the first to read a new book.
- They could check out one of the copies of the current readaloud book and read along with the teacher.
- They could hear an additional chapter of the readaloud book at the end of the day if students got all their work done.
- They could be a "mystery reader," able to read a favorite picture book to the class.
- They could choose reading buddies, selecting a classmate to read with during sustained silent reading (SSR) time.

- Flashlight Friday – they could use flashlights to read during a special SSR.
- They could read on a computer, selecting a text with a friend.
- Readers' theater – they could choose a script, recruit classmates, practice reading, and perform for an audience.
- Read-a-thon – students could earn this activity by meeting monthly or term goals.
- Author visit – students could meet a visiting author, eat lunch together, and get an autographed book.
- Book selections – students could have input on class and school library book selections.
- Book recommendations – students could present synopses of favorite books.

Here are a few comments from teachers in the study:

- "I had never used reading as a reward for reading. That is something that has really validated reading for me and my students. It isn't a chore. We read to get to read more."
- "I was really amazed at the students' excitement to receive more readaloud time or an afternoon of readers' theater. The students would work hard to earn these privileges. And the great thing is that many of these activities were also opportunities for more reading practice, feedback, and instruction time for me – without the students even noticing. This… has been a game changer for me."
- "My students look at reading differently. Maybe not all of them, but most of them. I've noticed the majority now look at reading as something we enjoy doing."
- "One thing I've seen more of is a shift in my students' personal reading habits. If you look around my classroom, almost every student has a book on their desk."
- "It's like, you do this good thing of reading – and you get to do more of that same good thing."
- "I would never go back to teaching like I did before! I would have never believed I would get this response from students!"
- A fifth-grade teacher quoted one of her struggling readers saying, "Wait, I can read and I'm good at it. I'm actually good at it!"

"Providing Proximal Rewards: Rethinking Reading Rewards and Motivation" by Lorilynn Brandt, Douglas Gardner, and Sarah Clark in *The Reading Teacher*, May/June 2024 (Vol. 77, #6, pp. 927-936); the authors can be reached at lorilynn_brandt@byu.edu, dgardner@uvu.edu, and sarah_clark@byu.edu.

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3. A Teacher's Dilemma on Using A.I. to Grade Students' Writing

In his *New York Times* "The Ethicist" column, Kwame Anthony Appiah responds to a junior-high-school teacher's question: students were told not to use artificial intelligence as they worked on an argumentative essay, while some teachers were using an A.I. program to give students formative feedback. "I find this hypocritical," said the teacher. "I spend many hours grading my students' essays. It's tedious work, but I feel that it's my responsibility. If a student makes an effort to complete the task, they should have my undivided attention during

the assessment process… Should I embrace new technology and use A.I.-assisted grading to save time and my sanity even though I forbid my students from using it?"

Appiah agrees with telling students not to use A.I. as they write an essay. "As with many other skills," he says, "writing well and thinking clearly will improve through practice." But the same rationale doesn't apply to teachers grading papers; they already know how to do that.

The question is whether A.I. platforms can reliably assess students' writing and help them improve. "The hope," says Appiah, "is that they can grade without inconsistency, without getting tired, without being affected by the expectations that surely affect those of us who hand-grade student work." If A.I. can do a decent job, he thinks teachers should use it, being sure to look over the annotations for quality and discuss any shortcomings with students.

Prompt and reasonably accurate A.I. feedback to students is a gift of time for teachers. That time, says Appiah, "might be better spent on other things – and by 'better,' I mean better for the students. There are pedagogical functions, after all, that only you can perform… It's not hypocritical to use A.I. yourself in a way that serves your students well, even as you insist that they don't use it in a way that serves them badly."

"Can I Use A.I. to Grade My Students' Papers?" in "The Ethicist" by Kwame Anthony Appiah in *The New York Times*, June 2, 2024

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4. What Human-Type Teachers Can Do That A.I. Can't

In this online article, John Spencer makes the case for a blended approach to teaching, taking into consideration what artificial intelligence does well and what only humans can do. A.I.'s strengths:

- Synthesize information
- Generate examples
- Role-playing
- Create systems
- Use predictive analytics
- Analyze a problem
- Help with conceptual understanding

And what humans do best:

• *Context* – We bring broader and deeper knowledge to in-person interactions and problem-solving – situations like the debate at a local school board, the institutional knowledge of a teacher, or the number of cultural values present in any classroom. As they conduct interactive pedagogy like project-based learning and Socratic seminars, says Spencer, teachers can be "the experts in facilitating the understanding of context… in a way that a machine simply cannot do."

• *Divergent thinking* – "Humans can think abstractly, draw on personal experiences, and incorporate emotional and cultural nuances into their decision-making processes," says

Spencer. "Teachers can be wildly and unabashedly different." A.I., on the other hand, is limited to its training data and lacks the ability to imagine and innovate.

• *Creativity* – In humans, this is "almost like an itch that we need to scratch," says Spencer. "Something nags at you and you just have to figure it out… A.I. experiences no joy when it finds an answer and no mild anxiety when an answer is elusive." Artificial intelligence depends on inputs and outputs from vast datasets, lacks self-awareness, and responds only when we ask it questions.

• *Empathy* – Humans can often "read the room" and pick up on intangibles like a person's body language. "Many teachers have an uncanny ability to figure out what is actually motivating a student in the moment," says Spencer, then scaffold learning based on interests, strengths, and goals, and fine-tune in real time as the student responds. What people remember about their best teachers is almost always in this affective realm.

"Our humanity, as imperfect as it may be, is a gift to our students," Spencer concludes. "In an age of A.I., our students still need a human to listen and empathize; to experiment and adapt; to make mistakes and apologize. They will need a guide who can build a relationship and help them navigate a complex world."

"Why A.I. Can't Replace Teachers" by John Spencer, May 23, 2024

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5. The Nuts and Bolts of Launching a No-Cellphone Policy

In this sidebar in Peter Stiepleman's *School Administrator* article on schools that decided to prohibit student use of cellphones during the school day, he suggests eight keys to successful implementation:

- Stakeholder feedback – Start by using surveys and focus groups to get input from students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the community.
- Initial school board information – Give board members facts on how cellphone bans have been implemented by other schools – and the benefits.
- An information-only presentation to the board – Prior to making a decision, board members and the public should see survey results and engage in open discussion.
- Allaying safety concerns – This presentation should include information on how student cellphone use during an emergency can lead to confusion and misinformation and complicate the work of first responders.
- Parent information meeting – Host a meeting in which concerns from family members can be aired and addressed.
- Parent communication during the school day – Help family members understand that they can get information to their children, and hear from them, via the school office (the way they did before cellphones).
- Pilot implementation – Start small, banning cellphones in one or two schools and gathering data and feedback.

- Everybody on board – Once a phone-free policy is implemented, it's important that school leaders implement it consistently.

"A Mindshift Over Cellphones in Schools" by Peter Stiepleman in *School Administrator*, June 2024 (Vol. 81, #6, pp. 28-33); Stiepleman can be reached at animperfectleader@gmail.com.

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6. How Supervisors Might Follow Up After Short Classroom Visits

In this *Principal Center* article, former Seattle principal Justin Baeder makes the case for short, frequent, unannounced classroom visits, each followed promptly by a brief face-to-face conversation with the teacher. In these chats, focused on low-key discussions of pedagogy and building trust, Baeder suggests avoiding the "feedback sandwich," instead focusing on getting the teacher talking about something specific that happened during the visit. Here are some possible questions, each with a broader purpose:

- Interpretation – *At one point in the lesson, it seemed like ----. What was your take?*
- Context – *I noticed that you ----. Could you talk to me about how that fits within this lesson/unit?*
- Perception – *I saw students ----. What were you thinking was happening at that point?*
- Decision – *Tell me about when you ----. What went into that choice?*
- Comparison – *I noticed that students ----. How did that compare with what you had expected to happen when you planned the lesson?*
- Antecedent – *I noticed that ----. Could you tell me about what led up to that, perhaps in an earlier lesson?*
- Adjustment – *I saw that ----. What did you think of that, and what do you plan to do tomorrow?*
- Intuition – *I noticed that ----. How did you feel about how that went?*
- Alignment – *I noticed that ----. What links do you see to our instructional framework?*
- Impact – *What effect did you think it had when you ----?*

"Classroom Walkthroughs FAQ for Instructional Leaders" by Justin Baeder in *Principal Center*, June 6, 2024; Baeder can be reached at justin@principalcenter.com.

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7. Doug Lemov's Rigor Checklist

In this passage in *Teach Like a Champion 3.0*, Doug Lemov offers his vision of what rigor looks like in classrooms:

- Students write frequently and describe or reflect on at least one important idea in complete sentences (first grade and above).
- Teacher consistently asks students to improve, develop, and revise initial answers verbally or in writing.

- Teacher introduces new and advanced vocabulary and students use these words frequently to engage and discuss the content of the lesson.
- Students read challenging text (grade level or above) and text-dependent questions are used to ensure they are able to establish meaning. The discussion is not limited to the establishing of meaning, but the step is not overlooked.
- Teacher achieves voice equity; almost everyone participates by speaking; everyone participates by listening. Teacher uses *Cold Call*, follow-ons, and formative writing among other tools to achieve this.
- Students use retrieval practice to encode key knowledge in long-term memory.

Teach Like a Champion 3.0 (Jossey-Bass, 2021, p. 58)

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8. The Benefits of Debate and Debate Pedagogy for High-School Students

In this article in *Education Next*, Beth Schueler (University of Virginia) and Katherine Larned (Harvard Graduate School of Education) report on their study comparing high-school students who participated in a debate team (part of the Boston Debate League) and comparable students in other high schools whose schools didn't have a debate team. Their findings:

- Students involved in debate scored significantly higher on standardized reading tests than the comparison group, with the increment increasing with years in debate.
- Debate students scored higher in math than the comparison group, with only slight increases over time.
- The biggest gains in reading and math scores were among students who initially had the lowest academic achievement.
- Students involved in debate were more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in four-year colleges.
- Again, those most likely to see these increases were students with the lowest incoming academic achievement.

Schueler and Larned believe these gains come from the rigorous nature of debate preparation and competition – the preparation, feedback, and motivation that are intrinsic to the activity.

But what about students in schools that don't have debate teams? The authors suggest that many of the characteristics of debate can be integrated into ELA and other high-school classes – what been called debate-centered instruction. "While our study demonstrates exciting results for extracurricular debate participants," say Schueler and Larned, "there may be even greater dividends to incorporating some of these practices into regular classroom-based instruction to reach all students."

"Resolved: Debate Programs Boost Literacy and College Enrollment" by Beth Schueler and Katherine Larned in *Education Next*, Summer 2024 (Vol. 24, #3, pp. 52-59); Schueler can be reached at bs6bv@virginia.edu.

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9. Supporting Middle-School Students Who Lack Basic Literacy Skills

In this *Edutopia* article, Kentucky educator Sarah Yost says that as a middle-school ELA teacher, "I was often perplexed by how my students could have made it to sixth, seventh, or eighth grade without ever having learned how to read fluently or even crack the alphabetic code with automaticity." Drawing on the Institute of Education Science's paper, "Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9," Yost suggests ways to support middle-school students with underdeveloped reading skills:

• *Teach students to decode multisyllabic words*. To understand grade-level texts, below-level students have a lot of catching up to do, and two strategies are helpful: breaking longer words into syllables and helping them decode those, and building their knowledge of Latin and Greek roots that support making sense of many English words.

• *Build students' reading fluency*. Repeated reading of grade-level texts helps build students' speed, accuracy, prosody, and confidence.

• *Build background knowledge*. For example, EL Education schools have seventh graders spend three weeks reading and discussing a wide variety of nonfiction texts on a single topic – epidemics. "When students know something about what they're reading," says Yost, "they will recognize the words and syntax, read more fluently, and ultimately better comprehend what they're reading."

• *Practice making sense of "stretch" texts*. Work with students on challenging material, pausing to explain words and discuss content and building their confidence and engagement with ideas and vocabulary.

"Evidence-Based Practices in Literacy Intervention in Middle School" by Sarah Yost in *Edutopia*, May 30, 2024

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10. Does Choral Reading Help with Fluency?

In this online article, Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/Chicago) responds to a second-grade teacher's question on the efficacy of choral reading, which students "have a lot of fun with." There's not much research on this question, says Shanahan, but he has several observations based on studies he's read and years of observing classrooms:

• Students faking it – They may move their lips but it's similar to how some people look like they're singing "The Star Spangled Banner" at a baseball game but don't remember all the words and can't hit the high notes. In classroom choral reading, it's difficult for the teacher to tell which students are really participating.

• Working in pairs – To maximize time on task, get students reading aloud to each other, which requires them to make a commitment to the text and actively participate, with the teacher walking around observing, supporting, and correcting.

• A challenging level – When students read aloud, they should be working with texts above their instructional level. "Not much benefit from practicing a text you can already read well," says Shanahan.

• Introducing a new text – One situation where choral reading can work is launching a new text, perhaps a song or poem, and making the activity more like an authentic public performance.

• Not overdoing it – Shanahan encourages teachers to spend minimal time on choral reading and focus on students reading a wide variety of texts – stories, social studies articles, science books, poems, and develop a sense of how to navigate them fluently.

"Choral Reading: Good Idea or Not?" by Timothy Shanahan in *Shanahan on Literacy*, June 8, 2024; Shanahan can be reached at shanahan@uic.edu.

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11. Short Item:

The Story Behind the Song "Blackbird" – A little-known fact is that "Blackbird" by the Beatles is about the Little Rock Nine during the Civil Rights Movement. Here's an NPR story about it, and a new rendition of the song by Beyoncé.

"What The Beatles and Beyoncé's 'Blackbird' Means to This Little Rock Nine Member" by Juliana Kim, *NPR*, April 2, 2024

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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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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
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Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
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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