Marshall Memo 1010

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
November 6, 2023

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Quotes of the Week

"If the first time our child faces a major setback is in college, they are unlikely to be as resilient or have as large a toolkit of ways to respond to the failure. Therefore, it's better that they fail and learn how to respond earlier in life."

Paul Oberman (see item #1)

"Somewhere in the arguments about whether books are 'educationally suitable' we've lost the thread of why we want students to read in the first place, what they, and we, stand to gain in the process, and what's at stake."

Gay Ivey and Peter Johnston (see item #2)

"AI is here to stay, and today's students will enter a world where they'll be expected to engage with it. So it is critical for students to understand the capabilities – and limitations – of AI tools, even as those capabilities rapidly evolve."

Daniel Leonard (see item #6)

"We romanticize childhood as a time of play, imagination, and bliss. For many children, this could not be further from the truth."

Travis Wright (see item #3)

"Figuring out how to see the best in children who are trying to convince us that they are 'bad kids,' or reaching out to connect to kids as they run from us, is not easy, but it is what is required. This is the work of healing."

Travis Wright (*ibid.*)

"In the same way that we must avoid assuming that all children in some schools have trauma, we must not think that children in some schools have none."

Travis Wright (*ibid.*)

1. How Much Homework Help Should a Parent Provide?

In this article in *Journal of Jewish Day School Leadership*, former principal Paul Oberman describes an all-too-common dilemma. A child is in tears at the kitchen table, past his bedtime, struggling with math homework that will be collected and graded the next morning – and most of the problems completed so far are incorrect. What should the parent do?

- Call it a night.
- Do the homework for him.
- Circle the wrong answers and have him to correct those so he'll see a better strategy.
- Have him walk you through one of the solutions, noting where he's making errors.
- Create a similar problem and walk him through the process; then he can do the others.
- Create a similar problem and walk him through *his* process, highlighting his errors.

This is an immediate, short-term problem and the clock is ticking, says Oberman. But the real question is what's best for this child in the *long term*.

It turns out there's a lot of research on students' academic help-seeking behaviors (this was the subject of Oberman's dissertation). There are two distinct types:

• *Executive help-seeking* – The student asks for the answer. If the parent provides it, says Oberman, that's maladaptive. In the example above, it doesn't help the child's long-term success in math if the parent says something like, "This one's wrong. It should be seven." Teachers definitely don't want parents doing their children's homework for them, and when a child hands in work done by a parent, they're both complicit in academic dishonesty.

• *Instrumental help-seeking* – The student asks for just enough help to be able to complete the work independently. This is adaptive in the short and long term. In the above example, some effective parental prompts:

- Have you checked your answers?
- Can you find your mistakes?
- Let's look at your notes to see whether you did some sample problems in class.
- Here is a similar problem. How would you solve it?
- Is there a friend you can call for help? (Hopefully the friend won't just give the answers.)
- Can you explain to me what the problem is all about?

With an English or social studies assignment, the prompts might be:

- Have you addressed all aspects of the rubric?
- Would this essay persuade you?
- Have you put in your best effort?

"The more ownership your child can take, the better," says Oberman. "The pencil or pen should always remain in your child's hands, and you should never just tell them the answer."

Another factor that's at work in situations like this is the child's self-efficacy beliefs about math: *Am I capable of doing this work?* Self-efficacy is distinct from self-esteem and much more important to long-term success in any subject area. The way the parent handles help-asking has a direct impact: doing the homework for the child undermines self-efficacy. The same is true if the child just gets the answer from ChatGPT.

If it's late and the child has already put in the time and made a good-faith effort, it may be best to send the kid to bed and get in touch with the teacher to discuss what's causing difficulty and what extra help your child – or perhaps the whole class – could use.

"We are raising our children to leave us," says Oberman, so when should we get out of the homework-helping business? He believes the trick is to encourage instrumental help-seeking and supporting but gradually weaning kids so that by high school, we're monitoring but no longer giving substantive help (which in all likelihood we will no longer be able to provide anyway). "If the first time our child faces a major setback is in college," says Oberman, "they are unlikely to be as resilient or have as large a toolkit of ways to respond to the failure. Therefore, it's better that they fail and learn how to respond earlier in life."

"Parents and Homework: How Can Parents Best Support Their Children?" by Paul Oberman in *Journal of Jewish Day School Leadership*, December 2023; Oberman can be reached at DrOberman@DrPaulOberman.com.

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2. Surprising Results when Teens Read Spicy Young Adult Novels

In this article in *Language Arts and Literacy*, Gay Ivey (University of North Carolina/ Greensboro) and Peter Johnston (University of Albany) describe the battle lines on book bans in the U.S. On one side is the fear that certain books will traumatize, radicalize, or undermine the morals of young people in a time of increasing anxiety, loneliness, depression, and suicide. On the other side is a passionate argument for unfettered access to ideas, student choice, and democracy.

But in fact, say Ivey and Johnston, most young adolescents rarely read books on their own, and if they do pick up controversial books, we know very little about how they react.

To explore these issues, Ivey and Johnston worked with several 8th-grade ELA teachers who decided to stop assigning works of literature for their whole classes. Instead, they let students choose from a wide range of young adult books, gave them time to read, and then led class discussions. Over two years of observing classrooms and interviewing students, then following up with some students for another two years, Ivey and Johnston came to the following conclusions:

• Students, most of whom had done little or no independent reading beforehand, "started reading like crazy – in and out of school – and their reading achievement improved."

• Students reported that reading engaging stories about characters with complicated lives made them more empathetic, less judgmental, more likely to understand multiple

viewpoints, and morally stronger. Students reported that they had better self-control, friendships, and family relationships.

• The notion that teens would be distressed as they read controversial books alone was the opposite of what happened, say Ivey and Johnston. Kids pestered teachers, family members, and friends to read the books and talked about the characters, relationships among them, drugs, sex, and depression. Parents said they welcomed these conversations.

• Far from emulating the unwise choices made by characters in the books, students saw the stories as cautionary tales and scoffed at the idea that they would make such poor decisions. "The books helped them to see the consequences of problematic decisions and language," say Ivey and Johnston. "The complexities of characters' lives and the consequences of their decisions deepened students' moral thinking while making them grateful for their lives and families. The books reduced their own self-absorption, diminishing personal concerns that might otherwise overwhelm them. Bad words and disturbing scenes simply fed bigger conversations about life and relationships."

• "Reading and talking about personally meaningful books can provide a *literal* lifeline for teens," conclude Ivey and Johnston. "Somewhere in the arguments about whether books are 'educationally suitable' we've lost the thread of why we want students to read in the first place, what they, and we, stand to gain in the process, and what's at stake."

"What Happens When Young People Actually Read 'Disturbing' Books" by Gay Ivey and Peter Johnston in *Language Arts and Literacy*, October 31, 2023; their new book, from which these ideas were excerpted, is *Teens Choosing to Read: Fostering Social, Emotional, and Intellectual Growth Through Books* (TC Press, 2023); the authors can be reached at mgivey@uncg.edu and pjohnston@albany.edu.

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3. Broadening Our Understanding of Childhood Trauma

In this *Kappan* article, Travis Wright (University of Wisconsin/Madison) says that often, "trauma-informed practices" inform educators about how trauma affects children's mental health and behavior and suggest ways to minimize triggers and promote positive behavior. "But frameworks that focus primarily on the child's behavior and strategies for regulating the classroom environment," says Wright, "do not meaningfully consider healing from trauma as a relational process. Thus, they neglect the central role that teachers, peers, and others may play in supporting or further harming children navigating trauma and other forms of chronic stress." He suggests three ways to think differently about trauma.

• *Distinguishing trauma from adversity* – Wright says this difference is critically important for educators supporting young people and their families:

- Adversity is the challenging circumstances of life.
- Trauma is a response to adversity, affecting emotions, behavior, learning, health, self-understanding, and relationships.

"Essentially," says Wright, "trauma is how we physically and psychologically convert overwhelming experiences of fear and injustice into intrapersonal suffering. Far too often, we

forget that trauma is the *symptom* of adversity, and that the root causes of traumatic stress are those things that lead us to feel terrified, helpless, or hopeless."

What happens too often, he believes, is that students are referred for counseling because of their behavior or academic performance, not because of what happened to them (of course good counselors and psychologists quickly figure out the link). Terms like "trauma" and "trauma-informed" are becoming shorthand for "at-risk," functioning as coded language about race, social class, and neighborhood – leading to statements like, *How could he not be traumatized given where he's from?* or *I bet every child in that school has trauma*.

What's tricky for truly traumatized students is that educators may force them to choose between adaptations that keep them safe outside school – for example, being wary of obeying adult authority when some adults in their lives are violent, predatory, or abusive – and being asked in school to immediately submit to the authority of every adult and being seen as disrespectful and antisocial if they don't.

• *From traumatizing to messy* – As an antidote to the problematic use of the word *trauma*, Wright has begun referring to children's lives as *messy*. "We romanticize childhood as a time of play, imagination, and bliss," he says. "For many children, this could not be further from the truth. Children frequently navigate complicated relationships, competing demands, heartbreak, disappointment, loss, confusion, and the full range of emotions that life might provoke." They may be dealing with bullying, making friends, worrying about family members' mental and physical condition, a divorce, family financial stress, racism, pandemics, and weather emergencies – all with less agency and fewer resources than adults.

Messy life circumstances don't necessarily produce a traumatic stress reaction in a child. Conversely, children can sometimes be traumatized by situations that don't seem overwhelming to adults – for example, a child overhears a news account about war or tragedy in another part of the world and doesn't have concepts of proximity, politics, or weather patterns to put it in perspective. Children can seem "okay" while enduring extremely challenging situations.

The ongoing messiness of some children's lives can produce a reaction just as intense as a single traumatic event, says Wright. Living with a parent struggling with addiction, being victimized at school, or experiencing homelessness can produce "the same cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses as more-acute events like being bitten by a dog or witnessing an automobile accident," he says. "Worrying about something – or doubting that difficult situations will change – seem to be as negative for our mental and physical health as actually experiencing the event itself… Feeling afraid or stigmatized or fearing rejection can erode one's sense of safety and security. The slow burn of such despair can be as corrosive as a moment of terror."

• *Understanding children's responses to messiness* – Children dealing with ongoing stressors rarely of their own making – exposure to addiction, hiding immigration status, poverty, community violence, intense academic pressure – "may have difficulty naming their fears," says Wright, "because what scares them is woven into the daily fabric of their lives." They may be more likely to internalize their difficulties, viewing themselves as somehow

deficient. The stressors that children endure cross social-class divides, he says: "In the same way that we must avoid assuming that all children in some schools have trauma, we must not think that children in some schools have none."

• *Emotionally responsive teaching* – "Teachers play a central role in children's lives," says Wright, "helping them feel safe in a world that is sometimes scary, teaching them to hope, and supporting them in learning. Because life is often messy, our ways of understanding children and their behavior may sometimes require us to develop messy, or less-simplistic, ways of understanding them as well." The emotionally responsive paradigm is a way of thinking about teaching in this context.

One key understanding is that the traumas children experience usually occur within relationships with family members. "Most often," says Wright, "it is the people children love and who are responsible for keeping them safe who hurt them most. These relational aspects of trauma undermine children's capacity to trust others and their self-concept, view of the world, sense of safety, and orientation to relationships." They may be focused on fleeing from punishment and from trusting connections with others. To overcome this emotional trap, children need to feel seen, valued, and understood – a set of corrective experiences that allow them to be open to love.

"Figuring out how to see the best in children who are trying to convince us that they are 'bad kids,'" says Wright, "or reaching out to connect to kids as they run from us, is not easy, but it is what is required. This is the work of healing." It requires a shift from the traditional top-down view of teaching as imparting knowledge and skills *to* students to a more reciprocal model of constructing knowledge *with* students, seeing them not as passive recipients but as capable and competent learners. "We must hold for our students a vision of themselves as strong, smart, and healthy," he says, "while being able to see clearly what they need to get there… We seek to honor the fact that children enter the world with the capacity for knowledge, connection and joy. Our job as educators is to liberate and expand those capacities."

"Reframing Trauma-Informed Practices" by Travis Wright in *Kappan*, November 2023 (Vol. 105, #3, pp. 8-13); Wright can be reached at travis.wright@wisc.edu.

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4. Restorative Practice 2.0

(Originally titled "Don't Give Up on Restorative Practice!")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Jamila Dugan describes the key characteristics of restorative practice, which has been embraced by some schools in recent years:

- Creating a sense of community within the school;
- Building healthy relationships among community members;
- Creating a sense of belonging and agency;
- Using classroom rituals and routines like talking circles;
- Students checking in with a trusted adult at school;
- Talking through challenging issues and perhaps implementing new policies;

- Looking for the root causes of student misbehavior;
- Developing everyone's conflict resolution skills;
- Responding to misbehavior in ways that help students learn from mistakes;
- When accountability is needed, acknowledging harm and identifying ways to repair it.

"The spirit of restorative practices," says Dugan, "recognizes culture as a living entity that everyone plays a role in creating… A restorative approach can serve as a counter to harmful practices that disproportionately affect marginalized students."

But despite initial enthusiasm, "an increasing number of educators now appear ready to give up on restorative practices," says Dugan. "Many teachers express concerns that restorative approaches don't work." There's backlash, with some saying that restorative practices are soft on student misbehavior, make excuses for not suspending malefactors, and haven't significantly reduced discipline problems in many schools.

Dugan believes this is happening for several reasons: (a) a belief that restorative practices are about fixing student misbehavior and racially disproportionate suspension rates, failing to buy into the full transformational program; (b) getting tied up in implementation issues – PD, hiring, scheduling – and not making a fundamental shift in how members of the school community relate to one another; and (c) losing touch with the original reason for moving away from "zero tolerance" disciplinary practices – i.e., reshaping relationships within the school through care, reciprocity, and accountability.

In sum, restorative practice hasn't lived up to its potential due to misunderstandings and lack of a clear vision. Dugan suggests the following steps to get back on track:

• *Commit and don't quit*. "This journey is not a quick one," she says, especially with the increases in students' emotional angst during and after the pandemic. "Restorative practices can help teachers stay calm and create a *proactive* plan for responding to challenging behavior, which feels very different from reacting emotionally in the moment."

• *Ensure change is happening*. Dugan urges schools to publicly track equitable academic outcomes and accountability for student behavior, signaling the community that they're in it for the long haul.

• *Internalize concepts*. "For any restorative approach to make a difference," she says, "a significant number of educators in a school must commit to studying the approach in depth." A critical mass of staff members must have a shared understanding of the key concepts.

• *Work with, not for*. Restorative practices cannot be done in isolation, says Dugan. School leaders need to build understanding and trust among families, teachers, and other leaders, answer their questions, hear their concerns and ideas, figure out what adults in the building need to "start, stop, or continue doing to demonstrate care for all students and hold kids accountable in a fair way."

"Moving toward a school culture based on these concepts and practices," Dugan concludes, "means creating a reality that has never existed before: an education system in this country that consistently treats racially marginalized students with care, respect, and loving accountability."

“Don’t Give Up on Restorative Practice!” by Jamila Dugan in *Educational Leadership*, November 2023 (Vol. 81, #3, pp. 35-41)

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5. Programs That Reduce Unnecessary Special Education Placements

In this article in *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk* (*JESPAR*), Mariëtte Hingstman (University of Groningen, the Netherlands) and Amanda Neitzel and the late Robert Slavin (Johns Hopkins University) note that certain student populations have higher rates of special education referral and placement:

- Boys;
- Students from low-SES families;
- Students with summer birthdays;
- Students of color.

“The disproportionate representation of certain groups of students indicates that there is room for improvement in the process of special education assignment,” say the authors. “There are plentiful situations in which a special education placement is the best option for a student, especially in educational systems where a special education status grants access to more-intensive types of intervention.” But if a student can be successful in mainstream classes, being placed in special education can have significant disadvantages. What are the characteristics of programs that help students with learning needs be successful in general education?

Hingstman, Neitzel, and Slavin report on their analysis of nine programs’ track record reducing elementary students’ placement to special education for mild to moderate academic or behavioral needs. The effect sizes of the programs varied widely, from + 0.38 to – 0.07. Here are the programs with brief comments on their impact:

Programs targeting academic achievement and behavior:

- Fast Track – Significant positive effects on some but not all measures;
- School-Based Intervention Team (SBIT) Project – Promising but limited data;
- Success for All (SFA) – Significant positive effects on some but not all measures;
- Structure of Intellect (SOI) Model Schools Pilot Program/Bridges – Not effective;

Programs targeting academic achievement:

- Start Making a Reader Today (SMART) – Promising but limited statistical evidence;
- Individualizing Student Instruction (ISI)/Assessment to Instruction (A2i) – Not effective;
- Reading Recovery – Significant positive effects (based on limited data);

Programs targeting behavior:

- PBIS*plus* – Significant positive effects (based on a small number of studies);
- Families and Schools Together (FAST) – Promising but limited statistical evidence.

The researchers identified three characteristics that were associated with reductions in special education assignments for learning problems, highlighting the programs that included those components:

• *Tutoring adapted to students' needs* – Reading Recovery and SMART are tutoring programs and both had "notable impacts on special education referrals and placements," say the authors. Success for All emphasizes tutoring, as does Fast Track in the early grades, and both did well in reducing special education placements.

• *Professional development* – An emphasis on PD was a common theme in the programs deemed effective, notably Success for All, PBIS*plus,* and Reading Recovery.

• *Parent involvement* – This was an element in the most effective programs, including Fast Track, Success for All, FAST, and SMART.

• *Tiers* – Effective programs were multi-tiered, supporting struggling students with additional interventions (Tier 2 and Tier 3) aligned with the classroom program.

"Preventing Special Education Assignment for Students with Learning or Behavioral Difficulties: A Review of Programs" by Mariëtte Hingstman, Amanda Neitzel, and Robert Slavin in *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, October-December 2023 (Vol. 28, #4, pp 380-411); Hingstman be reached at m.hingstman@rug.nl, Neitzel at aneitzel@jhu.edu.

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6. Putting Artificial Intelligence Tools to Work in Classrooms

"AI is here to stay," says Daniel Leonard in this *Edutopia* article, "and today's students will enter a world where they'll be expected to engage with it. So it is critical for students to understand the capabilities – and limitations – of AI tools, even as those capabilities rapidly evolve." Leonard suggests nine AI-based lesson ideas:

• *Animating students' drawings* – Using the Animated Drawings tool from Meta AI Research, students make a sketch, take a photo of it, upload the photo to the site, and see the sketch come alive performing dozens of actions: walking, dancing, leaping, and more. Students can then write a story about why their drawing is moving in certain ways.

• *Spur critical thinking about science* – A teacher might ask ChatGPT, *Please explain how clouds form to a third-grade audience* and have students critique the response: What did it leave out? What parts of the answer might not be accurate? Is there anything that's still not clear?

• *Images as writing prompts* – AI image generators like Stable Diffusion, Craiyon, Microsoft Bing's Image Creator, or Canva's New AI Image-Generating Tool can generate an image (like a goat eating cake while on a surfboard) that can spark creative writing by students.

• *Fact-check AI-generated historical images* – A teacher might ask one of the AI tools above to create an image of Sacagawea guiding Lewis and Clark, switch the "style" setting to "photograph" for maximum realism, and ask students to use what they've learned about this period of history to tell what is accurate and what isn't.

• *Seeing all sides of a math problem* – A teacher can have students solve problems with pen and paper, then feed the problems into Photomath and compare its solutions in terms of strategy and efficiency.

• *Voice imitation* – ChatGPT can be asked to imitate the style of well-known historical figures – for example, a teacher might ask it to write poems about the school's mascot in the

style of Shakespeare or Maya Angelou, or speeches about the impact of climate change by Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr., then ask students to comment on language use, alliteration, and literary devices.

• *Chat with historical figures* – Hello History allows students to simulate conversations with Cleopatra or Einstein (for example) and then look for inaccuracies and distortions.

• *World languages* – Chatbots can be helpful for vocabulary development, grammar, and overcoming students' self-consciousness about pronunciation and making mistakes. A possible prompt: *I want to practice my Spanish. Can you speak to me in Spanish at a ninth-grade level, with short sentences?*

• *Grading ChatGPT's writing* – Ask the chatbot to generate an analysis of, for example, *Of Mice and Men*, then have students get into groups and critique the essay using a rubric and come up with constructive criticism. "By taking on the role of an editor," says Leonard, "students can actively develop a better understanding of what makes an essay successful."

"9 Tips for Using AI for Learning (and Fun!)" by Daniel Leonard in *Edutopia*, October 30, 2023

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7. Stories and Poems About Joy

In this article in *English Journal*, Nicole Amato (California State University/Channel Islands) and Katie Priske (University of Iowa) recommend seven books that capture the ideas of writers Gholdy Muhmmad and Ross Gay, highlighting poems in several of the books (click the link below for cover images):

- *Bingo Love* by Tee Franklin
- *Muscle Memory* by Kyle Carrero Lopez – the poem "Ode to the Crop Top"
- *Black Boy Joy: 17 Stories Celebrating Black Boyhood* edited by Kwame Mbalia
- *Remember* by Joy Harjo, illustrated by Michaela Goade
- *Swan* by Mary Oliver – the poem "Don't Hesitate"
- *Customs* by Solmaz Sharif – the poem "Self-Care"
- *Ways to Share Joy: A Ryan Hart Story* by Renée Watson, illustrated by Nina Mata

"Critical Curations" by Nicole Amato and Katie Priske in *English Journal*, September 2023 (Vol. 113, #1, pp. 98-100); the authors can be reached at nicole.amato@csuci.edu and katie-priske@uiowa.edu.

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