Marshall Memo 1062

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
November 18, 2024

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"You make your mistakes to learn how to get to the good stuff."
Quincy Jones (see item #1 for more quotes)

"I want AI to do my laundry and dishes so that I can do art and writing, not for AI to do my art and writing so that I can do my laundry and dishes."
Joanna Maciejewska, author

"When readers misread words, those miscues often fit semantically or syntactically."
Timothy Shanahan (see item #4)

"Without denying the scope and potential of more-advanced classroom technologies, sometimes simple solutions are best, especially when we want to maximize our lesson time with students."
Emily Rankin (see item #7)

"Cynicism is just another word for laziness. It's an excuse not to take responsibility."
Rutger Bregman (see item #2)

"Unlike empathy, compassion doesn't sap our energy. That's because compassion is simultaneously more controlled, remote, and constructive. It's not about sharing another person's distress, but it does help you to recognize it and then act."
Rutger Bregman (*ibid*.)

"Understanding the other at a rational level is a skill. It's a muscle we can train."
Rutger Bregman (*ibid*.)

1. A Tribute to Quincy Jones

The legendary music producer, composer, and executive Quincy Jones died November 3rd. He was 91. Here is the *New York Times* obituary, and some memorable quotes:

When I was about five or seven years old my mother was placed in a mental institution… So I said to myself, "I don't have a mother. I don't need one. I'm going to let music be my mother."

The truth is, you don't try to be the best. You try to be the best you can be.

You make your mistakes to learn how to get to the good stuff.

You cannot get an A if you're afraid of getting an F.

Everybody, no matter what vocation they're looking at, should add music as an essential to their curriculum. Music can be a very important part of your soul and your growth as a human being. It's so powerful.

I believe that a hundred years from now, when people look back at the 20th century, they will look at Miles, Bird, Clifford Brown, Ella and Dizzy among elders as our Mozarts, our Chopins, our Bachs and Beethovens.

Without the Fender bass, there'd be no rock n' roll or no Motown. The electric guitar had been waiting 'round since 1939 for a nice partner to come along. It became an electric rhythm section, and that changed everything.

If architecture is frozen music, then music must be liquid architecture.

Young people should travel, and they don't. You can't know if you don't go.

I've always thought that a big laugh is a really loud noise from the soul saying, "Ain't that the truth."

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2. Ten Suggestions for Living in a Complicated World

In the epilogue of his book, *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, Rutger Bregman gives advice on how to apply his thesis – that humans are basically good – in a world that embraces the opposite view. "For ages," he says, "we've assumed that people are selfish, that we're beasts, or worse. For ages, we've believed civilization is a flimsy veneer that will crack at the merest provocation." He argues that this is simply not true – including in a chapter on the true story that contradicts *Lord of the Flies*: when 14 teenage boys were stranded on an island in the middle of the Pacific, they cooperated, solved problems, and were healthy and happy when they were rescued 16 months later (see Memo 1034 for a summary of this chapter). Bregman's advice for pushing back against the negative narrative:

• *When in doubt, assume the best*. Communication is tricky, he says. "You say something that gets taken the wrong way, or someone looks at you funny, or nasty comments get passed through the grapevine." Negativity bias kicks in, and you assume the worst. Far better, says Bregman, and far more realistic, is to give people the benefit of the doubt. Most of the time, this pays off.

• *Think in win-win scenarios*. Many companies, schools, and other institutions are organized around the idea that it's in our nature to be locked in win-lose competition. "In truth," says Bregman, "this works precisely the other way around. The best deals are those where everybody wins." Doing good is not only good, but it *feels* good because of the way we're built.

• *Ask more questions*. The Golden Rule comes in two flavors, says Bregman: the positive injunction (*Treat others as you wish to be treated*) and the negative (*Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you*). But both versions fall short, he believes, because we're not that skilled at empathy – sensing what other people want – and making assumptions robs others of their voice. It's better to *ask* them, listen carefully, and be guided by what they say.

• *Temper your empathy, train your compassion*. What Bregman calls the Platinum Rule calls for compassion versus empathy. What's the difference? Empathy is feeling *with* people who are suffering – *I feel your pain* – putting yourself in their shoes. The problem is that it's exhausting and unproductive. Compassion is feeling *for* others, recognizing their distress, and then deciding how to help. "Unlike empathy, compassion doesn't sap our energy," says Bregman. "That's because compassion is simultaneously more controlled, remote, and constructive. It's not about sharing another person's distress, but it does help you to recognize it and then act."

• *Try to understand the other, even if you don't get where they're coming from*. "When we use our intellect to try to understand someone," says Bregman, "this activates the prefrontal cortex, an area located just behind the forehead that's exceptionally large in humans." Yes, people have foibles and rational analysis doesn't always work, especially when we don't see eye to eye with someone. But using our intellect mostly works better than relying on our gut. "Understanding the other at a rational level is a skill," he says. "It's a muscle we can train."

• *Love your own as others love their own*. "Humans are limited creatures," says

Bregman. “We care more about those who are like us, who share the same language or appearance or background… Distance lets us rant at strangers on the Internet. Distance helps soldiers bypass their aversion to violence… As humans, we differentiate. We play favorites and care more about our own. That’s nothing to be ashamed of – it makes us human. But we must also understand that those others, those distant strangers, also have families they love. That they are every bit as human as we are.”

• *Avoid TV news and social media*. They are the biggest sources of distance among people, says Bregman, skewing our view of the world by generalizing people into groups and zooming in on the bad apples with the media’s negativity bias and manipulative algorithms. His rule of thumb: steer clear of television news and push notifications and read a more-nuanced Sunday newspaper and in-depth feature writing. “Disengage from your screen and meet real people in the flesh,” he says. “Think as carefully about what information you feed your mind as you do about the food you feed your body.”

• *Don’t punch people you disagree with*. It may feel good to lash out at bigotry, says Bregman, or lapse into cynicism: “What’s the point of recycling, paying taxes, and donating to charities when others shirk their duty? If you’re tempted by such thoughts, remember that cynicism is just another word for laziness. It’s an excuse not to take responsibility.”

• *Come out of the closet: don’t be ashamed to do good*. “To extend that hand you need one thing above all,” says Bregman. “Courage. Because you may well be branded a bleeding heart or a show-off.” It feels safer to keep a low profile and make excuses or fabricate selfish motives: *Just keeping busy. I didn’t need the money anyway. It will look good on my résumé*. But this approach isn’t helpful, he believes: “When you disguise yourself as a egotist, you reinforce other people’s cynical assumptions about human nature. Worse, by cloaking your good deeds, you place them in quarantine, where they can’t serve as an example for others.

• *Be realistic*. Bregman hopes his book has changed the meaning of that word. He believes a realistic view of humankind is that “people are deeply inclined to be good to one another.” His closing exhortation: “Be realistic. Be courageous. Be true to your nature and offer your trust. Do good in broad daylight, and don’t be ashamed of your generosity. You may be dismissed as gullible and naive at first. But remember, what’s naïve today may be common sense tomorrow. It’s time for a new realism. It’s time for a new view of humankind.”

“Ten Rules to Live By” in *Humankind* by Rutger Bregman (Little Brown, 2019)

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3. Why Is There an Obesity Achievement Gap?

In this Hechinger Report, Karvitha Cardoza describes what 18-year-old Stephanie remembers about her years in the Montgomery County, Maryland schools. Elementary classmates called her “fatty” and “Teletubby” and whispered “Do you want a cupcake?” as she walked by. When a fifth-grade classmate spread an unkind rumor, Stephanie hit him and was suspended. Some teachers were supportive, but others did nothing to stop the bullying.

What's worse, many teachers ignored her in class, even when she was the only one with her hand up. "I was like, 'Do you not like me or something?'" she thought. One middle-school teacher sat her at the back of the classroom, saying that if she sat in the middle or the front she would block other students' view (classmates laughed). When pastries were brought in to celebrate a birthday, a teacher asked Stephanie, "Are you sure you want to eat that?" Another teacher told her mother to put her on a diet. When a seventh-grade teacher didn't recognize Stephanie midyear when she came up after class to ask a question, the girl stopped caring about grades.

Remote learning during the pandemic was a gift for Stephanie, and when it came time to return to in-person learning, she applied for a waiver and continued to enjoy not being in school. In 2022, Stephanie had bariatric surgery, lost half of her body weight, and felt comfortable about in-person schooling again. People were suddenly nice to her, which she found frustrating: "I'm the same person!"

In 2020, almost 20 percent of U.S. children (15 million) were considered obese, and the proportion has risen steadily over the last 40 years. Many children with obesity have associated medical conditions, including asthma, diabetes, sleep apnea, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Studies show they are also more likely to get lower grades in reading and math, miss school, get detentions or suspensions, be placed in remediation or special education, and repeat a grade. They are also less likely to attend and graduate from college.

Researchers have recently zeroed in on a new factor in the fraught experience of many children with obesity: educator bias. Some teachers see children with obesity as emotional, unmotivated, less competent, and non-compliant, giving them fewer opportunities to participate in class, less positive feedback, and lower grades. One study asked 130 teachers to grade similar essays paired with photos of students; overweight students' work received moderately lower scores. The author of this study found that teachers were more likely to view students with obesity as academically inferior, "messy," and more likely to need tutoring. But when questioned, teachers said they treated all students fairly and equally.

Rebecca Puhl of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Health at the University of Connecticut reports that some teachers believe that if students with obesity want the bullying to stop, they need to lose weight. But dealing with obesity is not as simple as eating less and exercising more. It's a complex condition influenced by genes, hormones, culture, environment, and economic status (living with both obesity and poverty creates a "double disadvantage"). Bullying and mistreatment can worsen the condition by encouraging binge eating.

Weight bias is embedded in American culture, says Puhl: "Teachers are not immune to those attitudes." She believes K-12 educators need to recognize this, confront deeply embedded attitudes about obesity, and address them in PD along with other biases.

"Kids with Obesity Do Worse in School. One Reason May be Teacher Bias" by Karvitha Cardoza in Hechinger Report, October 23, 2024

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4. Should Three-Cueing Be Banned?

In this online article, Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/Chicago) discusses the practice of three-cueing in light of bans passed by a number of state legislatures across the U.S. Cues are hints that readers can use to figure out an unknown word. For example, in the sentence, *The sailor lifted the* ____, there are three possible strategies for figuring out the unknown word:

- *Semantics* (meaning) – It's logical that a sailor would lift an anchor, mainsail, or cargo, but the word could also be an item anyone would lift – a pen, coffee cup, magazine, etc.
- *Syntax* (sentence structure) – This word is going to be a noun, which narrows things down.
- *Graphophonics* (the sounds or pronunciations of letters and spelling patterns) – Readers might sound out the mystery word, or look at the first two letters – *an* – and use semantic and syntax cues to guess that it's *anchor* – but it might be *anchovy*.

Studies on reading miscues show that students, "when trying to read words, will use whatever information is available to accomplish that," says Shanahan, so "three-cueing is a research-based idea."

But the pushback from "science of reading" advocates is that too many students are not using graphophonic cues, relying instead on semantic and syntax cues, including pictures, to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words – which leads to errors that undermine good comprehension. "When readers misread words," says Shanahan, "those miscues often fit semantically or syntactically."

Here's where research on good and poor reading is informative. "Eye-movement studies," he says, "show that good readers look at all the letters when they read. Other studies show that as readers increase in proficiency, their reliance on those graphophonic cues increases, while their use of the other systems declines. In other words, poor readers rely on these cueing systems to help them to guess at the words they can't read, while better readers focus as much as possible on the letters and sounds. Those other cueing systems aren't reading – they're a 'work around' when for some reason reading isn't working. That's probably why so many studies have found that phonics instruction is beneficial and that reading brains show a coordination of the visual and phonemic information."

Teaching students to guess words rather than sounding them out is problematic, says Shanahan, but he's not in favor of legislation that bans three-cueing. Why? Because "these laws and regulations are more likely to undermine quality instruction than to encourage it." Decades of research show that good reading is more than decoding; it also involves using meaning, structure, and syntax in service of the ultimate goal: good comprehension.

It's not enough to sound out a word, concludes Shanahan. Because of the idiosyncrasies of the English language, phonetic decoding may produce a word that makes no sense. That's when the reader has to consider other sounds or pronunciations and evaluate them against meaning, structure, and syntax. So yes, students should sound out unknown words

(graphophonics), but they also need to use semantics and syntax to develop into good comprehenders and thinkers.

"Three-Cueing and the Law" by Timothy Shanahan in *Shanahan On Literacy*, November 16, 2024; Shanahan can be reached at shanahan@uic.edu.

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5. Do Retention and Remediation Work for Struggling Eighth Graders?

In this article in *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, Matthew Larsen (Lafayette College) and John Valant (Brookings Institution) report on their study of the long-term effects of a grade retention policy in Louisiana secondary schools. The program used test scores to decide which eighth graders should be promoted, retained, or assigned to "grade 8.5" in high school with remedial courses in key subjects.

What did the study find? Surprisingly, students who were socially promoted to ninth grade did better academically in high school and college than those assigned to "grade 8.5" with remediation, and the "8.5" students did better than those who were retained in eighth grade. "The effects we find on high school graduation and college attendance are large," say the authors; "being fully promoted to 9th grade versus fully retained in 8th grade increases the probability of graduation by approximately 38% relative to the baseline means… Notably, these effects extend beyond high school to college enrollment. They do not appear to extend to college persistence or graduation."

Why did socially promoted students do better than those who received remediation (and those who were retained)? "Whatever the benefits might have been from providing remedial instruction deemed academically appropriate," say the authors, "they seem to have been outweighed by the costs of requiring students to navigate high-school requirements while taking non-credit-accruing remedial courses (as well, perhaps, as the psychological consequences of students being told they were not academically ready for high school coursework)." It's also possible, they add, that the retention policy might have encouraged students to work harder and smarter in middle school, and perhaps improved the quality of instruction.

"With evidence mounting that retention is less harmful in early grades than late grades," conclude Larsen and Valant, "this study suggests that even a nuanced and thoughtful approach to late-grade retention may do more harm than good, with effects that extend beyond high school to college enrollment."

"The Long-Term Effects of Grade Retention Evidence on Persistence Through High School and College" by Matthew Larsen and John Valant in *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, October-December 2024 (Vol. 17, #4, pp. 615-646); Larsen can be reached at larsenmf@lafayette.edu.

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6. A Straightforward, Low-Cost Way to Improve Math Achievement?

In this article in *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, Kelly McGinn, Laura Young, and Julie Booth (Temple University) and Alexandra Huyghe (SERP Institute) report on their study of teachers using mathematics practice worksheets incorporating two instructional strategies:

• *Worked examples* – Students see a fully solved math problem – for example, a long multiplication example showing the step-by-step process to solve 12 x 1238. The idea behind worked examples is that the scaffolding provided by a solved problem doesn't overload students' working memory, which helps them understand and learn the overall procedure. "Worked examples may reduce this extraneous load," say the authors, "by allowing students to attend to the relevant aspects of the problem in order to develop schemata for the problem type."

• *Self-explanation prompts* – Students are asked to look at a worked example and make explicit the reasoning involved in solving the problem.

The researchers studied 373 urban fifth graders in several mid-Atlantic Title I schools as their teachers implemented MathByExample worksheets (which use worked examples and self-explanation prompts) and a control group whose teachers used business-as-usual worksheets (teachers were free to use their preferred approach to math instruction).

The results, comparing students' scores on the iReady and PARCC assessments with those of a control group:

- Students who used worksheets with worked examples and self-explanation prompts did significantly better on iReady and PARCC tests than the control group.
- The longer students used the MathByExample worksheets, the better their test results.
- The MathByExample worksheets had fewer math problems than the worksheets used by the control group, yet students in the experimental group did better. Thus, the worked-example/self-explanation approach was more efficient in terms of class time.

"The Effect of Worked Examples and Self-Explanation Prompts on Mathematics Standardized Assessments" by Kelly McGinn, Laura Young, Alexandra Huyghe, and Julie Booth in *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, October-December 2024 (Vol. 17, #4, pp. 1008-1030); McGinn can be reached at kelly.mcginn@temple.edu.

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7. The Humble Document Camera – A Low-Tech Tool with Great Potential

In this *Edutopia* article, teacher/administrator Emily Rankin says her own use of document cameras as a high-school English teacher was limited to annotating texts and displaying student work – until she visited the Michaela Community School in London. "I saw teachers in every classroom using document cameras to expertly live-model the precise thinking behind how to formulate paragraphs and solve formulas," she says, "addressing misconceptions along the way."

In a world of interactive whiteboards, tablets, and virtual reality headsets, document cameras might seem spartan. "Without denying the scope and potential of more-advanced classroom technologies," says Rankin, "sometimes simple solutions are best, especially when we want to maximize our lesson time with students." The latest document cameras, with sharper projection, auto-focus, and WiFi connectivity and a price tag just under $100, have real possibilities. Among them:

• *Guided practice* – Teachers can highlight key vocabulary in a text, predefining it before reading with students, and then model annotation of a text or walk students through chunking or summarizing reading passages. "With their jointed bodies and swiveling heads," says Rankin, "document cameras can also be used to record demonstrations such as exhibiting surface tension in physics, showing charcoal pencil shading in art, or solving a quadratic equation in math… You can even model executive functioning skills like organizing notes in a notebook."

• *Assessment for learning* – A document camera allows teachers to gradually reveal answers on a quiz, correct errors or misconceptions on work and then improve it on the spot, highlight example work by grading criteria, celebrate models of excellent student work, and orchestrate peer feedback to students as they share their work.

• *Sharing materials* – After groups of students produce a collaborative mind map or artifact, a document camera allows the class to do a "gallery walk" without getting up. "Students can give their peers an up-close show-and-tell under the camera," says Rankin, "and teachers can zoom in on advertising small print in English, an exoskeleton in biology, or a vintage map in geography. They can page through a storybook, textbook, or collection of political propaganda."

• *Expanding teaching and learning possibilities* – Teachers can host a visiting speaker and turn the document camera toward the class for a virtual audience, like a webcam. Other possibilities:

- Use it to make a stop-motion video to display an object's mechanics.
- Block the opening of a play to analyze character positions;
- Have students lead exercises through reciprocal teaching;
- Broadcast your watch or a timer to keep students on track during a timed activity;
- Scan and store materials without needing to visit the photocopier;
- Record yourself teaching a lesson and talk it through with a trusted colleague.

"In Praise of the Humble Document Camera" by Emily Rankin in *Edutopia*, October 29, 2024

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8. What Can Happen When Teens Connect with Seniors

In this article in *School Library Journal*, author Gayle Forman (*Just One Day*, *Where She Went*, *If I Stay*) remembers her elderly grandmother, Detta, telling Forman's 13- and 16-year-old daughters about when she was a young woman and so full of rage when another woman flirted with her husband that she set the woman's dress on fire. The girls realized that

Detta had been "a complex woman full of strong feelings, someone like them!" says Forman. "She had been, and she still was."

Forman wishes that when she was her daughter's age, she had asked more questions of her grandparents and other family members about their escape from Europe as the Nazis came to power. "There is an immediacy to learning about the world as it was from a living, breathing person who existed in that world," she says. And cross-generational conversations benefit both parties, she says. Visiting assisted living homes, she sees "a pervasive thirst of residents to be seen, to be talked to, to share their stories, to be valued."

Forman muses about the potential of schools working with families to orchestrate such conversations. "What if we encourage children to have more direct and more authentic connection to the past via those who have lived it? What if we provided avenues and opportunities for young people to seek out their grandparents or other elders in their lives and in their communities as part of a living history curriculum? What if we invited the young to ask the old about the big things and the small things in their lives? For the young to tell the old about the big things and small things in their lives?... Would they begin to see themselves as part of a continuum? Would they understand the deep through-line of humanity: a desire to love and be loved, to feel like they matter, like they belong somewhere, basic needs that connect across cultures, across generations?"

In a sidebar, Forman shares her favorite children's books about intergenerational connections (click the article link below for cover images and brief summaries):

- *Drawn Together* by Minh Le, illustrated by Dan Santat, preschool-grade 2
- *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White, grade 2 and up
- *Tree, Table, Book* by Lois Lowry, grade 3-7
- *As Brave As You* by Jason Reynolds, grade 5-8

"Living History" by Gayle Forman in *School Library Journal*, November 2024 (Vol. 70, #11, pp. 30-33)

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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
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