

Marshall Memo 1047

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 29, 2024

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Quotes of the Week

“Where my reason, imagination, or interest were not engaged, I would not or could not learn.”
Winston Churchill (quoted in item #1)

“Away for the day.”
The maxim when cellphones are banned for the entire school day (see item #3)

“Think of AI as a brainstorming partner, not an authority.”
Punya Mishra (Arizona State University) quoted in [“AI and Equity: A Guide for Schools”](#) by Alyson Klein in *Education Week*, July 17, 2024

“The Silicon Valley hype machine would certainly love to convince us that our era is the AI equivalent of the early 1990s Internet. Faculty don’t begrudge or police students using Google in academic research, and spellcheck is a rudimentary AI we expect they’ll employ. Something is surely lost, though, when the tools to fix style are allowed to formulate substance as well. This, then, is the challenge of using generative AI in higher education: How do we teach and practice thinking and creativity – precisely the skills these tools encourage us to outsource for the sake of efficiency? Writing is not just a means to an end: It is a means of self-discovery. Finding one’s voice is not just about what ends up on the page – the journey matters more than the destination.”

Michael Serazio (Boston College) in “ChatGPT’s Uncanny Valley of the Mind” in *The Boston Globe*, July 28, 2024; Serazio can be reached at serazio@bc.edu.

“We start out with the intention of making the important measurable, and end up making the measurable important.”

Dylan Wiliam in [“The Validity of Teachers’ Assessments,”](#) a paper presented to the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education, July 1998

1. David Brooks on the Unique Qualities of Late Bloomers

In this article in *The Atlantic*, David Brooks lists people who flourished late in their lives, among them Paul Cézanne, Charles Darwin, Julia Child, Morgan Freeman, Isak Dinesen, Morris Chang, Alfred Hitchcock, and Copernicus. Why didn't these people (and many others) excel earlier? What traits or skills enabled them to achieve great things well past what was supposedly their prime? "It turns out that late bloomers are not simply early bloomers on a delayed timetable," says Brooks. "Late bloomers tend to be qualitatively different, possessing a different set of abilities that are mostly invisible to, or discouraged by, our current education system." He suggests some traits that parents and educators might watch for and encourage with kids who seem to be off to a slow start:

- *Intrinsic motivation* – Late bloomers often don't care about the kinds of extrinsic rewards built into schools and the workplace – grades, prizes, money, and other goodies designed to get people to adopt a "merit-badge mentality" and keep working on inherently unpleasant tasks, complying with other people's methods and goals. Winston Churchill was a bad student because he needed something that his schools rarely offered. "Where my reason, imagination, or interest were not engaged," he said, "I would not or could not learn."

- *Early screw-ups* – Brooks names several later-famous people who in their 20s and 30s were fired, got in fistfights, or couldn't get along with colleagues. They weren't good at following rules and adhering to the conventional rules of success, but they survived and eventually got their act together.

- *Wide-ranging curiosity* – "Many late bloomers endure a brutal wandering period," says Brooks, "as they cast about for a vocation. Julia Child made hats, worked for U.S. intelligence... and thought about trying to become a novelist before enrolling in a French cooking school at 37." Diverse interests and years of exploration finally led to a true avocation.

- *The ability to self-teach* – "Late bloomers don't find their calling until they are too old for traditional education systems," says Brooks, so they figure out other ways of acquiring the knowledge and skills they need.

- *An explorer's mind* – After years of false starts and mistakes, when late bloomers come into their own, they are freer of the ties and associations of early bloomers and more able to change their minds and update what they're working on.

- *Wisdom* – "After a lifetime of experimentation," says Brooks, "some late bloomers transcend their craft or career and achieve a kind of comprehensive wisdom... the ability to see things from multiple points of view, the ability to aggregate perspectives and rest in the tensions between them."

- *Unstoppable energy* – “I’ve noticed this pattern again and again,” says Brooks describing two mentors who were driven and productive at the very end of their lives: “Slow at the start, late bloomers are still sprinting during that final lap – they do not slow down as age brings its decay. They are seeking. They are striving. They are in it with all their heart.”

[“You Might Be a Late Bloomer”](#) by David Brooks in *The Atlantic*, June 26, 2024

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2. Eight Myths About the College Admissions Process

In this article in *Independent School*, Joseph Corbett (Clarity) and Aaron Fulk (University School of Nashville) say two changes in the college admissions process – SAT/ACT optional (or not) and the Supreme Court’s decision on affirmative action – have amped up the already high level of anxiety and uncertainty for students and parents. Drawing on the results of a recent NAIS survey of college counselors in 184 independent schools, Corbett and Fulk address these widely believed myths about college admission:

- *Myth #1: The more schools you apply to, the better.* Applying to multiple colleges makes the logistics of the process overwhelming and stressful: personal and supplemental essays, navigating college portals, working with your high school to get the right information submitted, paying fees, traveling to colleges, and more. “When students’ attention is spread thin,” say Corbett and Fulk, “they may end up submitting lower-quality applications overall,” and not focusing on what matters most: finding the schools that will be the best fit. The College Board recommends applying to no more than eight colleges, looking for a combination of “match,” “reach,” and “safety” schools.

- *Myth #2: Applying early admission/action increases the chance of success.* It’s true that acceptance rates are higher for students applying early; that’s due to the smaller, more-competitive applicant pool and demonstrated commitment. But the downsides are significant: early decision applications are binding, which can limit comparing financial aid offers from other colleges, and submitting a polished application early in a student’s senior year might not be the best strategy.

- *Myth #3: Test-optional policies reduce pressure on students.* There’s wide variation in whether SAT and ACT scores are required, and several major colleges have recently shifted back to requiring scores. In addition, students who choose not to submit scores feel pressure to beef up other parts of their academic and extracurricular profile. There’s also the worry that admissions officers will draw a negative inference about students who don’t include SAT/ACT data in their applications.

- *Myth #4: To be competitive at selective colleges, students must submit scores.* “This is misleading,” say Corbett and Fulk. “The influx of applications to test-optional schools has intensified the competition, making it even harder to stand out.” It’s not clear that submitting high test scores makes a difference.

- *Myth #5: Test-optional policies boost opportunities for lower-income students.* That’s the equity argument, but if they don’t submit test scores, these students’ essays, extracurricular

activities, and letters of recommendation must be outstanding. The problem, say Corbett and Fulk, is that “lower-income students may have less access to high-quality preparation resources for these aspects of their application, potentially putting them at a disadvantage compared to their more-affluent peers.” There are also structural disadvantages, including access to advanced courses, non-academic activities that appeal to admissions officers, and personalized guidance counseling.

- *Myth #6: College rankings correlate with academic quality.* Because of the metrics used, rankings often don’t paint the full picture, giving less attention to teaching quality, student support services, and the overall student experience. What’s more, some colleges game the ranking process by putting resources into what’s measured to the detriment of other parts of their program. It’s vital that students look beyond rankings when considering different colleges.

- *Myth #7: Selective colleges guarantee career success.* “The benefits of elite institutions may not be as significant as one might think,” say Corbett and Fulk. One study found that Ivy League degrees had “a small and statistically insignificant impact” on future earnings. What matters more is the college’s fit for the individual student, well-matched course selections, specialized programs, effective pedagogy, mentorships, internships, hands-on learning, and whether students develop their skills, knowledge, and determination.

- *Myth #8: You can evaluate a high school by where graduates go to college.* This oversimplifies the education a school provides, say Corbett and Fulk: “The true measure of a school’s value lies in how well it prepares students for their future, fostering skills like critical thinking, resilience, and creativity... equipping them with the tools to thrive wherever they choose to go after graduation.”

[“Reality Check: Debunking College Admission Myths”](#) by Joseph Corbett and Aaron Fulk in *Independent School*, Summer 2024

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3. A School Cellphone Ban That Sticks

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Amber Northern says that in a recent survey, 72 percent of high-school teachers said student cellphones were a major problem in their classrooms. Northern recently attended a presentation by three middle- and high-school leaders who successfully implemented an “away for the day” cellphone policy during the 2023-24 school year. The schools reported a decrease in fighting, bullying, cheating, and emotional distress, with students more engaged and productive in their classes.

These schools had tried “red” and “green” cellphone zones (classrooms, cafeteria) and found that approach impossible to monitor. They also tried Yondr magnet-secured pouches, but students figured out ways to unlock them or insert burner phones while keeping their “real” phones in their pockets or purses. Some students forgot to unlock the pouches and called the school at 7 p.m., desperate to liberate their phones.

After these unsuccessful attempts, the schools decided that all cellphones would be stored in a secure location for the entire school day and implemented the policy successfully. Here are the leaders' nuts-and-bolts recommendations:

- *Overcommunicate before implementing.* Parents will be "livid," they said, unless the stage is set well before the new policy is implemented (the survey mentioned above found that 56 percent of parents said students should sometimes be allowed to use cellphones in school). The schools formed a voluntary committee with representation from administrators, teachers, parents, and students to sharpen the rationale for a ban. They used phone calls, a newsletter, and social media to inform every household about the rationale as the dialogue unfolded. Student members of the committee interviewed peers and did research focused on the many problems caused by cellphones in school.

In a series of meetings, drafts of the policy were shared, and parents were bluntly told that they would not be able to text their children during class (parents chuckled and got the message). In the three weeks prior to rollout, school leaders sent e-mail reminders every other day with details and consequences for violations. "Students continued to push back," reports Northern, "but given the incessant communication and multiple opportunities to weigh in, parents were fully aware of the policy (even if they weren't 100 percent on board) and no longer squabbled with their kids about it." On the day the policy was launched, there were numerous reminder signs at the schools' entrances, hallways, and classrooms.

- *Set up a system for collecting, storing, and returning phones, with consequences for noncompliance.* After much debate, the schools decided on simple wooden boxes (available on Amazon for about \$40) to store cellphones. Homeroom teachers were responsible for checking students in during first period, getting all phones into the box (turned off), locking it, and being there for students to pick up their phones at the end of the day (with substitute teachers, principals took responsibility for the boxes). Consistent enforcement was key, with illicit cellphones confiscated and parents required to pick them up (one school had escalating consequences, including Saturday school and out-of-school suspension for second and third offenses).

- *Teachers' phones, too.* The schools believed that including teachers in the policy was vital to its credibility and success – everyone was in the same boat, learning how to keep their cellphone obsession at bay for six hours a day and being present with the humans around them. Didn't teachers need cellphones for emergencies? When necessary, they used the intercom, two-way radios, landline phones, computer-based alert systems, and old-fashioned panic buttons. Teachers found it a difficult adjustment, but in the seven months of implementation, they reported real success.

["How to Implement a Cellphone Ban in Schools"](#) by Amber Northern in *Education Gadfly*, July 25, 2024

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4. Should Teachers Use Timers During Lessons?

In this *Edutopia* article, Henry Seton says that when he first began teaching high-school humanities, he didn't use a timer during lessons; that felt a little robotic, more suited to nerdy science and math teachers.

But over the last two decades, Seton has embraced timers as a helpful tool in organizing his lessons and getting the most out of each class. Here's why:

- *Efficiency* – “The time we spend with students is our most precious resource,” he says. There's a finite amount of time each year (about 84 hours), and it can be nibbled away by less-worthy activities. A timer kept him intentional about each lesson component.

- *Planning* – “Mini-lectures” can easily extend into blather, he says, when segments aren't planned with the bigger picture in mind.

- *Priorities* – Thinking through minute-by-minute timing raises the question of whether one fascinating detail is really important to the learning goal. The timer “builds a gentle culture of urgency,” says Seton – for students and the teacher.

- *Equity* – If the wrap-up of a lesson is rushed, vulnerable students are the ones who lose the most; conversely, a tight, well-organized lesson has a greater benefit for them. “Often the most critical lesson components for supporting all students happen in the second half of the lesson,” says Seton, “– things like independent practice, checking for understanding, reteaching and consolidation. Timers help us make sure we can get to these key moments in the lesson rather than falling behind during less-important warm-up activities.”

When he first started using a timer, Seton worried about coming across like a drill sergeant. Here's how he's made the process less officious:

- Making the timer visible but not aggressive – usually a count-down digital clock on the screen, which eliminates the need for distracting verbal prompts.
- Deciding on the best amount of time for different activities – for example, 45 seconds for a quick partner turn-and-talk, ten minutes for a group lab activity.
- Getting students' suggestions on how much time they need.
- As the timer counts down, asking students to show with their fingers if they need additional time, and how many minutes.
- Of course, using the timer for his own lesson segments, reining in the tendency to over-explain or go off on a tangent.

Timers aren't “the most dazzling piece of edtech,” concludes Seton, but they are “an indispensable tool in the teacher toolkit.” They might feel restrictive at first, but “when effectively used, timers ultimately liberate your teaching, unlocking higher levels of student growth and empowering you to make more-confident teaching decisions every minute of the day.”

[“Why I Learned to Embrace Classroom Timers”](#) by Henry Seton in *Edutopia*, July 25, 2024; Seton can be reached at hseton@gmail.com.

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5. Fluency 101

In this online article, Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/Chicago) deconstructs fluency, a literacy component that he believes hasn't received nearly enough attention. "Teachers often fail to teach fluency at all," he says, "and students fall further and further behind as the texts get harder." Here are his responses to frequently asked questions:

- *What is the point of fluency instruction?* During systematic phonics instruction, students need to pay attention to meaning as well as decoding. The goal is achieving automaticity – no longer needing to give conscious attention to the process. When students can read a text fluently – with appropriate pacing, phrasing, and expression – it's a sign that they've mastered decoding and can devote most of their mental bandwidth to the content.

- *What is the best way to teach fluency?* The National Reading Panel (2000) and subsequent research suggest oral repeated reading, with feedback on appropriate pausing, phrasing, and expression. The goal is for the reading to sound natural, which is a sign of good comprehension. "Nothing works automatically," says Shanahan. "You make it work." He recommends about 30 minutes of fluency practice a day, with each text read no more than three times, tapering off as students become more proficient.

- *Won't oral reading practice be mortifying for less-proficient readers?* Yes, if it's round robin reading, with one student reading and the whole class listening. But if the teacher has students read aloud in pairs and circulates to monitor quality, oral practice is less public, as well as greatly increasing the amount of reading each student does. "Practice isn't embarrassing if everyone knows it's practice," says Shanahan of this format. "Most students enjoy fluency work. It's active, involving, and they can see their own improvement."

- *What's the best way to pair students?* He recommends a random system – for example, using two class lists on concentric wheels and spinning them to create new groupings each day. It's also important for pairs of students to read from the same book and for the teacher to brief students on the purpose of paired reading and protocols for supporting and correcting each other.

- *What kinds of texts work best for paired reading?* Shanahan recommends using the material students are reading in class, including social studies and science texts. Using on-grade-level texts is important, since the goal is students reading challenging material with fluency and good comprehension.

- *What is the role of silent reading in fluency?* "Teachers can only be certain if students are fluent by listening to them read," says Shanahan. "Silent reading can only contribute to progress when students are really reading, and not just looking at pictures, skimming, skipping over unknown words, and turning pages." Oral reading allows teachers to monitor and improve fluency, with silent reading playing an increasing role starting in second grade, focused on comprehension.

- *Do all students need fluency practice?* Yes, except for those who can read demanding texts with understanding and prosody. "Fluency is a relatively constrained reading skill," says Shanahan. "That means students eventually reach a peak level of fluency, at which point instruction can be discontinued."

- *When is fluency practice not the answer?* Students who have limited background knowledge, vocabulary, grasp of syntax and discourse structure, or inability to focus on the right kinds of information won't benefit from repeated reading, says Shanahan. But with a reasonable level of proficiency in these areas, fluency practice is helpful.

- *How about beginning readers?* Fluency should not be the goal when students are just starting to decode, says Shanahan. In fact, at this stage it's good for students to be somewhat *disfluent*, with fingerprint reading proceeding slowly and each word standing out as it's decoded and practiced.

[“Teaching Fluency FAQs”](#) by Timothy Shanahan in *Shanahan on Literacy*, July 27, 2024; Shanahan can be reached at shanahan@uic.edu.

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6. Success Factors in Primary-Grade Reading Tutoring

In this *JESPAR* article, Karen Kortecamp (George Washington University) and Michelle Lynn Peters (University of Houston/Clear Lake) report on their study (conducted before the pandemic) of high-dosage one-on-one tutoring. They analyzed implementation of the Chapter One tutoring program with 185 kindergarten and first-grade students, most of them at risk of reading failure.

Not surprisingly, tutored students made significant progress in reading proficiency, outscoring a control group on multiple measures of reading achievement. Kortecamp and Peters believe the key ingredients of the program's success were:

- Frequent one-on-one tutoring conducted during the school day;
- Students tutored by well-trained paraprofessionals who were college graduates;
- A high-quality curriculum emphasizing decoding and reading stories;
- Continuous progress monitoring and responding to individual students' needs;
- Tight alignment with classroom instruction, with tutors in close touch with teachers;
- Tutors addressing the areas where students weren't successful in class.

Contrary to other studies that advocated using certified teachers as tutors, Kortecamp and Peters found that trained, college-educated paraprofessionals were just as effective, making it possible to bring tutoring to more students at lower cost.

[“The Impact of High-Dosage Tutoring on Reading Achievement of Beginning Readers: A Multi-Level Analysis”](#) by Karen Kortecamp and Michelle Lynn Peters in *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, July-September 2024 (Vol. 29, #3, pp. 291-309)

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7. A Critique of Credit Recovery

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Adam Tyner reports on a new study of online credit recovery, which is designed to catch up students who failed one or more high-school courses. The selling point of such programs is that schools won't have to send students to summer

school or have them repeat courses. In commercial credit recovery courses, kids navigate several online modules, take quizzes and assessments, and if they're successful, earn high-school credit. For school leaders, credit recovery courses are an appealing way (of course, not without cost) to boost graduation rates.

Researchers had several concerns about the programs they studied. Eighty-three percent of assessment questions in a credit recovery course were multiple-choice, only ten percent demanded analysis or evaluation, and only a handful of word problems asked students to engage in complex cognitive tasks. More important, in-person proctoring of final assessments was rare, the answers to most questions could be Googled in minutes, and there was little monitoring or regulation by the state or district. When students retake unit exams, they could compare their previous attempts with correct answers and work with questions in exactly the same sequence.

"This method," says Tyner, "maximizes the students' likelihood of passing the exam without actually understanding the material, further diminishing the credibility of these assessments."

The researchers made several recommendations to improve the validity and credibility of online credit recovery:

- Rewrite assessments so they measure deeper student understanding and learning.
- Mandate in-person proctoring of final exams.
- Institute state monitoring of programs, including random sampling of students to measure compliance and depth of learning.

["Is 'Credit Recovery' As Bad As They Say?"](#) by Adam Tyner in *Education Gadfly*, July 25, 2024; the full study is ["Failing to Learn from Failure: The Façade of Online Credit Recovery Assessments"](#) by Jennifer Darling-Aduana, Carolyn Heinrich, Jeremy Noonan, Jialing Wu, and Kathryn Enriquez (Annenberg Working Paper, June 2024).

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8. High-School Students Who Are Uncertain About Attending College

In this *JESPAR* article, Cynthia Murphy (Goodwin University) and Siffat Sharmin and Hsien-Yuan Hsu (University of Massachusetts/Lowell) report on their study of the post-secondary trajectories of a diverse cadre of 13,635 tenth graders whose self-reported attitudes about attending college fell into three categories:

- High aspirations
- Low aspirations
- Don't know (noncommittal)

High-school students' level of aspiration about attending college is of particular interest because it's one of the best predictors of whether they go on to attend and graduate from college – which in turn opens doors of opportunity, especially for less economically advantaged students. Students with high college aspirations are much more likely to attend and

graduate from college than those with low aspirations – but previous research has not revealed much about students who are noncommittal.

Murphy, Sharmin, and Hsu addressed this gap by checking in with all students in their sample over a ten-year period and documenting how many attended and graduated from college. Their major finding: students who were noncommittal about attending college as tenth graders were just as unlikely to attend and graduate from college as students who expressed low aspirations.

The researchers' main takeaway: teachers and parents should recognize that “the don't-know response is a warning sign for low future educational attainment.” In response, educators and parents should impress on these students (and those with low aspirations) the life-changing potential of a college degree and work to turn around the dynamic that undermines these students' desire to go to college – most likely stereotype threat that creates a self-perpetuating cycle of negative beliefs, low expectations, and inadequate effort.

[“Disparities in the Likelihood of Earning a College Degree Among Students with Noncommittal, Low, and High Educational Self-Expectations”](#) by Cynthia Murphy, Siffat Sharmin, and Hsien-Yuan Hsu in *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk*, July-September 2024 (Vol. 29, #3, pp. 177-205)

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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 HTML 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 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
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Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
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Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
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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