

Marshall Memo 1051

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 2, 2024

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Quotes of the Week

“When you hold young people to high standards and make it clear that you believe they can meet those standards, you are respecting them because you are taking them seriously, and they rise to meet the challenge because being respected is motivating.”

David Yeager (see item #3)

“As I've gotten older, I've come to recognize that when people give me tough love and tell me the truth, it's often the best sign that they really care about me.”

Tom Brady (see item #1)

“Teaching is an act of practical reasoning, persuasiveness, problem solving, and communication, It needs to be shaped by science, but much of it is improvisation rooted in experience.”

Timothy Shanahan (see item #4)

“Writing is a muscle that needs constant exercise.”

John McCarthy (see item #5)

“At the end of the day, how we feel is determined by small decisions we make. How much sleep we get, prioritizing a morning's walk with a friend, consuming media thoughtfully, refusing to discuss work and work stress when we are off the clock – these small things make a big difference, but we must do them consistently and relentlessly. We can't wait for changes to come from the top down; we must address the factors of exhaustion within our control to ensure we live healthy, peaceful, and satisfying lives.”

Emily Ballesteros in [“Why Are We More Exhausted Than Ever?”](#) in *Time*, March 11, 2024

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

Thomas Edison

1. Tom Brady on Key Principles of Team Leadership

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, retired and still controversial NFL star Tom Brady and Patriots season ticket holder Nitin Nohria (Harvard Business School) reflect on the lessons Brady learned about leading teams during his 23-year career. Brady believes that leaders don't accomplish anything by themselves. "In fact," he says, "nothing of significance in life is achieved alone. To do great things, we rely on teammates." Here are his suggestions for leading any successful team:

- *Put the team first, even when facing personal adversity.* Playing for the University of Michigan football team, Brady was twice beaten for the starting position by another quarterback and spent a lot of time on the bench. "But I refused to sulk or complain – which I had done my share of when I was younger – because I wanted to be focused on the team's success," he says. "This fundamental change in attitude set the tone for the rest of my athletic career."

- *Show appreciation for unsung colleagues.* One of the Michigan quarterbacks who was chosen over Brady made a point of recognizing the contributions of players who weren't scoring touchdowns and getting publicity; he commended them for doing the blocking and tackling needed to win games. "That made a huge impression on me," says Brady. "I began making a habit of giving credit to players in those underappreciated roles – not just because they deserved it but also to point out to others that no player should go unrecognized." In the NFL, he reached out to other members of the organization, including trainers and those who prepared meals and cleaned the locker room. "To be a great team, everyone needs to feel valued," he says, "and it's up to the leaders of the team to make sure that happens."

- *Set the standard and create a culture of 100 percent effort.* Brady says that on many football teams, there are players who are giving only 70 or 80 percent of what they're capable of. "They may not realize it," he says, "but they've been conditioned to do that" – especially on teams that aren't winning a lot of games. The only way to break that cycle is for someone on the team to push other players to do better, and he frequently took on that role, challenging teammates to lift more weights, watch more game film, run more wind sprints.

Brady also developed a habit of giving blunt feedback. "Hey, do you want me to lie to you and tell you what you want to hear?" he'd say. "Or do you want me to tell you the truth? You were not prepared today, so you weren't at your best. You need to do better." In football and other areas, he says, too many leaders shy away from having frank conversations. "As I've gotten older, I've come to recognize that when people give me tough love and tell me the truth, it's often the best sign that they really care about me."

- *Recognize teammates' individual psychology and find the best ways to motivate them.* What brings out the best in each player is different, says Brady. It might be money, making the All-Pro team, media attention, winning championships, or simply not getting cut from the team. Effective leaders tap into what makes each person tick. Some need compliments, some do best with a provocative challenge. And those who have had difficult lives especially need well-chosen motivation, lest their underperformance and negative attitude drag down the rest of the team.

- *Recognize and counteract external forces that can cause selfish behavior.* In the NFL, players can get pressure from agents and family members to focus on their own playing time and stellar moments versus the team's performance. Leaders need to be aware of these pressures, says Brady, "and continually reinforce the team-first message."

- *Create opportunities to connect as people away from work.* As a professional athlete, Brady loved offsite retreats and other ways to be together with teammates – bowling, texting, FaceTiming, or hanging out at each other's homes. "The more we were interested in and concerned about one another as teammates and didn't want to let one another down," he says, "the more motivated we were to do our absolute best, every day."

- *Understand and complement the style of the formal leader.* Brady talks frankly about how difficult it was for players to work with Bill Belichick's super-critical, fear-based, aloof leadership style. "So as a team leader," says Brady, "I tried to complement that approach by being a bit more upbeat... I tried to get to know my teammates deeply and show that I cared about them personally. I asked about their families and the things going on in their lives off the field. I made it clear that if we connected as teammates, they'd be my teammates for life, and I've tried to live up to that."

Brady says he played a small part in "the Patriot Way" – a decades-long ethos of super-competitiveness, intense practice, learning from mistakes, continuous improvement, and really taking time off between seasons (without getting out of shape). "We blocked out the noise that constantly surrounded us," he says, "and focused on getting better to win the next game."

Brady believes we need to start as early as kindergarten with these principles. "The core behaviors that make any of us a good teammate – unselfishness, discipline, humility – are wired into us when we're very young," he says. "If your childhood experiences taught you that people aren't trustworthy or don't follow through on promises, it can be tough to convince you otherwise when you become a pro athlete in your twenties."

["The Art of Leading Teammates"](#) by Tom Brady and Nitin Nohria in *Harvard Business Review*, September/October 2024 (Vol. 102, #5, pp. 62-69)

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2. Just Because You Have Data Doesn't Mean You Have the Right Data

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Michael Luca (Johns Hopkins University) and Amy Edmondson (Harvard Business School) describe how data-driven decision making often goes wrong – and what leaders need to watch out for to improve that track record:

- *Conflating causation with correlation* – Although we’ve been told more than once not to assume that one thing necessarily leads to another, this is a common decision-making error. People don’t separate out the confounding variables, say Luca and Edmondson – prior experiences, beliefs, and attitudes among some participants that might bias the outcome. The best way to be sure of causality is to have access to a randomized controlled trial: people are randomly assigned to two groups, one experiences the intervention, the control group doesn’t, and the results are compared. If an RCT study isn’t possible, the second-best option is a natural experiment: people chosen by lottery are separated into two groups and the impact of the experience on each is compared.

- *Underestimating the importance of sample size* – Here’s a question that many people get wrong: *Which hospital is more likely to have a day when more than 60 percent of the babies born are boys: A hospital that handles thousands of births a year or one that has only a few hundred a year?* The most common answer is, “About the same,” because people underestimate the effect of sample size on variability. But the smaller hospital will have more variability, hence an outlier year in which there are more baby boys than girls is more likely. Decision-makers need to weigh sample size and also the confidence interval – the range of values into which the true effect is likely to fall.

- *Focusing on the wrong outcomes* – “What you measure is what you get,” quipped the authors of a classic 1992 study. Leaders often focus on outcomes that are easy to measure rather than more-important ones that are difficult or impractical to gauge. “To really learn from any data set,” say Luca and Edmondson, “you need to ask basic questions like, What outcomes were measured, and did we include all that are relevant to the decision we have to make? Were they broad enough to capture intended and unintended consequences? Were they tracked for an appropriate period of time?”

- *Misjudging generalizability* – A senior vice president at a major tech company said that when he is deciding whom to hire, he doesn’t look at university grades. Asked why, he says he read a comment by a Google executive that grades don’t matter. It’s easy to see the folly of this statement, but Luca and Edmondson say leaders frequently overgeneralize from weak evidence. They need to ask whether a statement applies in other settings, the time periods being compared, the sample being discussed, and the composition of subgroups.

- *Overweighting a specific result* – “Relying on a single empirical finding without a systematic discussion of it,” say the authors, “can be just as unwise as dismissing the evidence as irrelevant to your situation.” Two questions to ask: Are there other data that validate the results of a particular approach? What additional information do we need to collect?

- *Trusting the crowd* – Luca and Edmondson recount a 1906 U.K. experiment in which scientist Sir Francis Galton (a cousin of Charles Darwin) gathered the slips of paper on which 700 people at a county fair wrote their guesses in a competition to see who could predict the weight of the meat from an ox about to be slaughtered. The individual guesses were all over the map, but when Galton tallied them up and computed the average, it was almost exactly correct – in fact, a pound closer to the actual weight than the winner of the contest. This experiment (written up in James Surowiecki’s 2004 book, *The Wisdom of Crowds*) seems to

prove that groups can come up with better solutions than experts. But “harnessing that wisdom can be challenging,” say Luca and Edmondson. “Collective intelligence is best when mechanisms are in place to promote active and diverse participation. Otherwise, crowds can amplify bias – especially when they’re homogenous in viewpoint.”

To overcome these six decision-making errors, leaders need to get input from people with different perspectives, ask them to challenge and build on each other’s ideas, and make sure that discussions draw on and analyze high-quality data. “Encouraging dissent and constructive criticism,” they say, “can help combat groupthink, make it easier to anticipate unintended consequences, and help teams avoid giving too much weight to leaders’ opinions. Leaders also must push people to consider the impact of decisions on various stakeholders and deliberately break out of siloed perspectives.”

A key ingredient in group discussions, say the authors, is psychological safety – “the expectation that candor is expected and won’t be punished... Participants should view asking probing questions as part of their job.”

[“Where Data-Driven Decision-Making Can Go Wrong”](#) by Michael Luca and Amy Edmondson in *Harvard Business Review*, September/October 2024 (Vol. 102, #5, pp. 80-89); Luca can be reached at mluca@jhu.edu.

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3. What’s the Matter with Kids These Days?

In this article in *Psychology Today*, David Yeager (University of Texas/Austin) says that from the time of the ancient Greeks (and probably before) adults have complained about how immature, lazy, and thin-skinned young people are. And young people have taken umbrage at how often older people criticize and judge them. Each generation finds fault with their successors, forgetting they were like that just a few years earlier. In this persistent generational divide, says Yeager, “older generations feel as if they are constantly catering to the needs of young people, only to be shamed or blamed for not doing enough.”

In the last few years, psychologists have concluded that it’s not a matter of flawed or deficient thinking among youth (defined as 10 to 25, from the onset of puberty to stable, independent status). Instead, experts now believe it’s the expression of normal – even positive – developmental needs as young people learn how to be socially successful and earn status and respect with peers and adults by making meaningful contributions to the world.

Seen from this perspective, when a young person seems to overreact by a comment by an adult, says Yeager, “it’s not a sign of a decline in the work ethic or ‘kids these days,’ or evidence of their being overly sensitive or entitled. Instead, it could mean that the event threatened their social status or their reputation. Because the young person’s brain or hormones made them highly attuned to that social information – sometimes in ways unforeseen by their managers – it caused a conflict that needed to be addressed. This new consensus suggests that if we can understand their perspectives, then the same motivational drives that lead to

problematic behavior can be channeled into helping young adults make important contributions to organizations, families, schools, and society.”

Here’s an example. A teen’s mother asks, “Did you brush your teeth?” What the kid hears is, “I think you’re so incompetent that you won’t even remember something so simple as brushing your teeth, and I don’t trust you to do it on your own.” The mother didn’t say all that, or even think it, but from the teen’s perspective, a defensive and angry response makes sense. It’s humiliating to be seen as incompetent and not trusted to do basic stuff (even if you often forget to do it).

The solution, says Yeager, is “wise feedback”: giving critical reminders and correction accompanied by a clear rationale and a statement of belief that the young person can meet a high standard with the right support. He and a fellow researcher tested this with a group of seventh graders after they finished the first draft of a five-paragraph essay. All students got detailed comments – *You need to put a comma here. Explain this idea further. Rearrange this sentence* – but some students got a hand-written note with their drafts: *I’m giving you these comments because I have very high standards and I know that you can reach them.*

The difference in the two groups was dramatic: 80 percent of the students who got the “wise feedback” note revised their essays, compared to only 40 percent in the control group. “When you hold young people to high standards and make it clear that you believe they can meet those standards,” says Yeager, “you are respecting them because you are taking them seriously, and they rise to meet the challenge because being respected is motivating. In that way, you’re working with young people’s developmental needs, rather than against them.”

[“How to Lead Young People”](#) by David Yeager in *Psychology Today*, September/October 2024 (Vol. 57, #5, pp. 32-37); Yeager can be reached at yeagerds@austin.utexas.edu.

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4. The Science and Art of Teaching

In this online article, Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/Chicago) says that as a rookie elementary teacher in the 1970s, he and his colleagues had a lot of pedagogical freedom. Standardized tests weren’t used to judge teachers’ impact, and there wasn’t a lot of guidance from research. Most teachers could choose curriculum materials, set up their classrooms as they wished, and take or leave the advice of veteran colleagues. “We were certain that we were terrific,” he says, “and that the kids were doing as well as possible. Without tests, there could be no contradiction.”

In those days, principals evaluated teachers largely on classroom management and parent satisfaction. Teachers stayed in their own lanes and believed that although there were different personalities and styles, they were all basically equal. Parents had opinions on which teachers were the “best,” often based on certain personality traits (“sweet” and “demanding” versus “crabby”) – although some parents did have a sense of where the most learning was taking place.

Then scientific research began to flesh out this “street data” on the characteristics of truly effective teaching, some of which teachers were using, some of which were missing:

- Starting lessons with a statement of purpose;
- Clear explanations;
- High expectations;
- Lots of teacher-student interaction;
- Checking for understanding;
- Informative feedback;
- Sufficient repetition.

And with elementary reading, phonics lessons with practice decoding and encoding, and comprehension lessons making connections with prior knowledge.

“Yes, with research we can identify potentially positive practices,” says Shanahan. “What we can’t do is tell teachers how best to implement these insights in real classrooms. Having everyone mindlessly read a purpose-setting script at the start of a lesson may be a no-brainer. Noticing that some kids are neglecting that purpose, seems more in the realm of art.”

That’s the balance teachers must strike, he believes: reading and understanding the research but not falling into “blind compliance or high-fidelity implementation,” instead marrying it with the ineffable side of the craft. “Science reveals what *can* work,” says Shanahan. “The art of teaching suggests what I might do to make the science work... Teaching is an act of practical reasoning, persuasiveness, problem solving, and communication. It needs to be shaped by science, but much of it is improvisation rooted in experience. Science may contribute to that, but it will never be sufficient. Art must have a place.”

What does the artful side of teaching – seldom quantified in the research – look like in classrooms? Shanahan lists some elements: Building rapport with students. Looking them in the eye. Smiling frequently. Affirmations when they succeed. The teacher being patient when one or two seemingly good explanations aren’t enough. Knowing when to double down and when to back off.

[“The Science of Reading Versus the Art of Teaching Reading”](#) by Timothy Shanahan in *Shanahan on Literacy*, August 24, 2024; Shanahan can be reached at shanahan@uic.edu.

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5. Four Ways to Get Students to Do More Writing

“Writing is a muscle that needs constant exercise,” says John McCarthy in this *Edutopia* article. He suggests these strategies to increase the amount of writing and build confidence, stamina, and skills:

- *Quick-write/free-write combo* – After reading an engaging passage or viewing a video, students write for 2-4 minutes without pausing. “It’s important that writers do not stop to fix grammar or spelling,” says McCarthy. “Just capture thoughts and ideas.” When the timer goes off, students review their writing and highlight at least three different parts that resonate. Then students have 4-8 minutes to choose one of their highlighted ideas and expand on it with

more details, context, and perspective. By the end of this combo they have a rough draft for further development.

- *Pictures as muses* – Well-chosen images can give students concrete ideas to write about. Click the article link below for several suggestions.

- *Teacher modeling* – Many students believe that professional writers – and their teachers – produce polished writing in a single draft. That myth is dispelled when students watch a teacher compose a passage – correcting errors, rewriting, thinking aloud about details and word choice. “Showing the imperfections,” says McCarthy, “helps students see in real time how writers improve the content through rounds of revisions and edits.” Taking this a step further, the teacher might plug a draft into ChatGPT or another generative AI app for a grammar check, edits, and style suggestions.

- *Making work public* – When the teacher is the only one reading students’ writing, motivation may not be high. McCarthy suggests having students “publish” their writing for an outside audience – in a classroom blog, on a hallway display, with an outside organization. “Not only the best work is published,” says McCarthy. “Instead, any work that fulfills the minimum requirements of quality should be published. The message to students is, *Your thoughts matter.*”

[“Strategies for Giving Secondary Students Plenty of Practice Writing”](#) by John McCarthy in *Edutopia*, June 7, 2024

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6. Financial Literacy Activities

In this *Edutopia* article, Daniel Leonard says high-school financial literacy classes yield big returns when students are out in the real world dealing with budgeting, saving, credit and debt, predatory loans, and more – but only seven states have high-quality requirements in this area. Leonard provides links to activities, some of which can be incorporated in math and ELA classes:

- [The bean game](#) with students manipulating tokens representing housing, food, insurance, clothing, transportation options, and more
- [Evaluate credit cards](#), pay stubs, and tax forms.
- [Budget-based project-based learning](#), a monthlong project in which students choose a career, receive a “salary” for the month, and decide how to spend it within a budget.
- [Financial Jenga](#) that has students pull out one of 50 credit-related events – car loan payments, identity theft, and more.
- More activities are available at [Next Gen Personal Finance](#) and [Consumer Financial Protection Bureau](#).

[“Teaching Kids to Manage Money Yields Big Returns, Research Says”](#) by Daniel Leonard in *Edutopia*, August 20, 2024

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7. Recommended 2023 Novels for Young People

In this feature in *Language Arts*, Kathryn Will and six colleagues list the books published in 2023 they chose for “enduring quality” (click the link below for cover images and brief summaries (next week’s Memo will have their picks for non-fiction and poetry):

Novels

- *Anybody Here Seen Frenchie?* by Leslie Connor
- *Attack of the Black Rectangles* by Amy Sarig King
- *Hazel Hill Is Gonna Win This One* by Maggie Horne
- *Swim Team: Small Waves, Big Changes* by Johnnie Christmas
- *The Language of Seabirds* by Will Taylor
- *The Last Mapmaker* by Christina Soontornvat, illustrated by Christina Chung
- *The Midnight Children* by Dan Gemeinhart
- *We Are Wolves* by Katrina Nannestad
- *Wildoak* by C.C. Harrington, drawings by Diana Sudyka
- *Yonder* by Ali Standish
- *Zia Erases the World* by Bree Barton

[“The 2023 Notable Children’s Books in the Language Arts”](#) by Kathryn Will, Patrick Andrus, Dorian Harrison, Joyce Herbeck, Laura Hudock, Osha Lynette Smith, and Fran Wilson in *Language Arts*, May 2024 (Vol. 101, #5, pp. 358-367)

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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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- The current issue (in Word or PDF)
- All back issues (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 20 years

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

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