

Marshall Memo 990

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

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Quotes of the Week

“If we want our students to thrive, we must always keep in mind that students must Maslow before they can Bloom.”

Greta Sandler and Stephanie Howell (see item #3)

“Telling people what we think of their performance doesn't help them thrive and excel, and telling people how we think they should improve actually *hinders* learning.”

Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall (quoted in item #5)

“Teachers who have watched a revolving door of administrators come through schools with grandiose change plans, only to vanish four years later, are naturally skeptical.”

Elizabeth Dampf (see item #4)

“We need to teach students not just history and civics, but also the virtues of democratic citizenship, beginning with the ability to consider arguments with which we disagree and to engage in dialogue and deliberation with people who hold views different from our own.”

Sal Khan and Jeffrey Rosen in [“Teach Citizenship the Way the Founders Intended”](#) in *Time*, May 22-29, 2023

“For those concerned about students abusing the power of ChatGPT, we just have to take the time and make sure we know our students and have worked with them closely enough to both inspire them to do their own work and take pride in work that is their own... It is only in the cultivation of human experience – our capacity to think, to link the mind with the heart in writing, imagining, and creating – that we will remain free in an AI-dominated universe.”

Leon Botstein (Bard College) in [“An Optimistic View”](#) in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 9, 2023 (Vol. 69, #20, p. 24)

1. Vetting a School Leader While Playing a Round of Golf

In this article in *School Administrator*, retired superintendent Jack McKay suggests that a golf course might be a good place to check out candidates for a leadership position.

Observing a player can reveal the following qualities:

- *Cooperation and trust* – “Can the individual abide by the game’s rules and be honest on the scorecard?” asks McKay.
- *Humility* – This includes recognizing talent and showing respect for other players and handling praise graciously.
- *Luck* – Does the person attribute failure to bad breaks or, instead, have a growth mindset about the practice and perseverance it takes to play well?
- *Golden silence* – “Golfers revel in peace,” says McKay. “Is the potential leadership partner comfortable with silence when appropriate?”
- *The small things* – On the course, this includes replacing the flagstick, raking the bunker, or helping to look for a lost ball.
- *Dealing with bad situations* – “How does the individual handle bad drives and missed putts?” asks McKay. “Each hit is a different story – and a chance for redemption.” Can the candidate remain calm in a clutch, channeling nerves into focused performance?
- *Visualization* – Accomplished athletes, actors, and professionals in other arenas form a mental picture of successful performance and use it to improve.
- *The big picture* – Golf is a series of individual swings, says McKay. Can the person focus on these micro performances while keeping the overall game in mind? That includes enjoying themselves.

[“A Round of Golf for Measuring a Candidate’s Character”](#) by Jack McKay in *School Administrator*, June 2023 (Vol. 80, #6, p. 14); McKay can be reached at jmckay@hmleague.org.

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2. Middle-School Students Plan a Full-Day Field Trip in New York City

In this article in *Middle Grades Review*, Vanessa Scanzfeld, Eric James, and Vincent Dotoli (Harlem Academy) describe how they challenged their middle-school students to plan a day-long field trip around New York City. Students spent six weeks working in small groups to plan the trip, following these guidelines:

- Leave school no earlier than 9:00 a.m. and return no later than 4:30 p.m.

- Stay with your group the whole day.
- Keep within a budget of \$35 per student.
- Eat lunch and snacks from two different cultures, with one type of food new to at least 80 percent of the group.
- Visit at least one iconic landmark.
- Spend time in at least two of the five boroughs.
- Study an exhibit in at least one museum, cultural center, university, or other institution of learning.

As students researched and decided on the details of their trip, they had to engage in planning, collaborating, negotiating, leading productive meetings, resolving conflicts, seeking help, dividing responsibilities, and advocating for their views. All this honed five social-emotional skills from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL): self-awareness, self-management, social awareness (including empathy), relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

On the appointed day, students took off on their various itineraries, each group accompanied by an educator (who took a non-directive role). Here’s a sample itinerary: the 6 subway to Canal Street; a morning snack of Chinese pastries; walking across the Brooklyn Bridge and viewing the Statue of Liberty; the 4/5 and N/R subway to 36th Avenue in Queens; the Museum of the Moving Image; a restaurant for Bosnian/Eastern European food; the R and 6 trains back to school.

Not every trip went exactly as planned: one group’s plan to ice skate in Riverside Park was nixed by a rainstorm (students got permission to use a gymnasium); another group got off at the wrong subway stop and, confused by the map, approached a passerby for directions. But overall, the trips have been successful over several years. Scansfeld, James, and Dotoli share the following insights:

- *Scaffolding* – Students do the planning during their twice-a-week advisory periods, with staff members starting them off with lists of possible food choices, landmarks, and institutions of learning and then increasingly leaving students to do their own planning.

- *Repetition* – “Students need plenty of repeated practice to internalize habits,” say the authors, “and we intentionally make this unit the focus of several weeks and repeat it for three years. By eighth grade, students truly do have the breadth of skills needed to work in a group to plan and implement this complex project.” Over their years at the school, students visit plenty of off-the-beaten-track locales.

- *Restraint* – “This unit calls for us to step back and empower students to rise to these tasks,” say Scansfeld, James, and Dotoli. “It is tough to let your students jump off at the wrong subway stop – especially when you know they are on a tight schedule. The advisor’s role, however, should be limited to safety, not perfect orchestration of the plan.” For example, one group had to deal with calling a museum to explain they would be late; another worked with transit authorities to figure out problems with subway passes; and a third had to figure out what to do when the restaurant they planned to visit was closed.

- *Insights about students* – Teachers have noticed that some students who struggle to handle classroom structure flourish on these trips. “Each year, this trip is a chance to step back and observe,” say Scansfeld, James, and Dotoli, “helping us to bring these realizations back to our traditional middle school environment. It pushes us to challenge our assumptions, to develop new opportunities for students to leverage these strengths, and ultimately to be better educators.”

[“A Field Trip That’s Not About the Destination but the Journey”](#) by Vanessa Scansfeld, Eric James, and Vincent Dotoli in *Middle Grades Review*, May 2023 (Vol. 9, #1, pp. 1-5); the authors can be reached at vscansfeld@harlemacademy.org, ejames@harlemacademy.org, and vdotoli@harlemacademy.org.

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3. Building Psychological Safety in Classrooms

“If we want our students to thrive, we must always keep in mind that students must Maslow before they can Bloom,” say Greta Sandler (Belgrano Day School, Argentina) and Stephanie Howell (Gold EDU and Pickerington Schools, Ohio) in this ISTE article. They believe psychological safety is a crucial foundation, defining it as a shared belief that students can express themselves, speak up, take risks, and make mistakes without fear of judgment or negative consequences. Sandler and Howell say that in classrooms where a visitor might hear students saying, *I have an idea, I made a mistake, This might not work, I need help, or I have a different view*, there’s likely to be more engagement, creativity, collaboration, and better learning outcomes. The authors describe how teachers can foster psychological safety:

- *Provide clarity.* It’s helpful for students have a clear idea of what they are learning, why they are learning it, and how they will learn, along with behavioral expectations that promote a safe and enjoyable learning environment.

- *Build self-awareness.* Students are encouraged to be reflective about how they learn, identify productive and unproductive habits, share their thoughts and feelings, say when they need help, seek feedback, make adjustments to their work, and take ownership for their learning.

- *Encourage students to express their emotions.* “When students feel safe to share their feelings,” say Sandler and Howell, “they can better understand their emotional responses to different situations. This self-awareness and understanding can help students better regulate their emotions.” The teacher might do individual and whole-class check-ins, building a sense of understanding, support, and community.

- *Facilitate class discussions.* When students feel they can share their ideas, all voices are heard and students become more confident in their ability to express themselves and contribute to the classroom community. The teacher needs to set ground rules and use effective strategies for focusing on a topic and getting all students thinking and contributing.

- *Nurture a growth mindset.* It’s helpful for students to learn the difference between a fixed and growth mindset, understand that it’s often their own beliefs that put learning at risk,

appreciate the role of attitude, strategy, and persistence, and shift from saying *I can't do this* to *I can't do this yet*.

- *Preach positive feedback.* Students are coached on receiving and giving feedback, assessing their own work, identifying their strong and weak areas, setting goals, and learning from their mistakes. Giving feedback to classmates can build empathy and strengthen their own understanding of knowledge and skills.

- *Infuse joy.* “Bring joy into the classroom, embrace fun, and create moments of play,” say Sandler and Howell. “When students have fun while learning, they are more willing to take risks and learning becomes memorable.” Games and friendly competitions keep students engaged, provide rapid feedback, and accelerate learning, as well as building a positive classroom culture. Compiling a music playlist to listen to while students work on projects can create a relaxed classroom climate as well as exploring different language features in the songs and making connections to curriculum content and reading materials.

[“7 Ways of Creating Psychological Safety for Students”](#) by Greta Sandler and Stephanie Howell in ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education), May 31, 2023

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4. Reducing Tension Between Teachers and Administrators

(Originally titled “Can Teachers and Administrators Get Along?”)

“Is animosity between teachers and administrators inevitable?” asks Elizabeth Dampf (Round Lake Area Schools, Illinois) in this article on the ASCD website. “Teachers, who are in the proverbial trenches, trust each other more easily... New administrators, however, get a culture shock when they realize that easy trust no longer extends to them. They have to earn it through years of integrity, service, and reliability. Even then, it can be broken in an instant.”

There are plenty of reasons for this distrust, says Dampf. Being a school leader “naturally entails some secrecy, politics, and unkept promises.” Teachers are often in the same school longer than their principals, who can forget what it’s like to be a teacher and get tied up in so many meetings that they lose touch with what’s going on in classrooms. In addition, superintendents impose a lot on teachers and often expect new principals to be innovators, leading to faculty eye-rolls. “Teachers who have watched a revolving door of administrators come through schools with grandiose change plans,” says Dampf, “only to vanish four years later, are naturally skeptical.”

Teachers and administrators can change this dynamic by rethinking assumptions and changing the stories we tell ourselves, she says. “Rather than jump to conclusions about the virtues or failings of an entire group, it’s essential to start with an assumption of reasonableness, rationality, and decency, and only then to wonder why someone is falling short of our expectations.” Her suggestions:

- Don’t blame an entire group for the shortcomings of one person.
- Stop bunching people in one role together and making ungenerous assumptions.
- Recognize how the system constrains people’s actions and reach out to help colleagues overcome their struggles.

- See *people*, not job titles, and let them build individual reputations without group baggage.
- Do less blaming and talk to professionals on the “other side” about their challenges, building mutual understanding and collaboration.

“With enough people committed to eradicating tension,” Dampf concludes, “teachers and administrators may both enjoy a healthier environment and sense of shared purpose.”

[“Can Teachers and Administrators Get Along?”](#) by Elizabeth Dampf in the ASCD website, June 2, 2023; Dampf can be reached at edampf@rlas-116.org.

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5. Coaching Teachers Through Collaborative Exploration of Data

(Originally titled “Should Coaches Give Feedback? It’s Complicated”)

In this ASCD website article, Jim Knight (Instructional Coaching Group) describes the way his father coached him when he was first learning to play hockey on a frozen pond in Canada. The feedback was specific, authoritative, and top-down – “You’re holding the stick too tight” – which was entirely appropriate, says Knight, when an expert is passing skills and knowledge to a novice.

When he first started coaching teachers, Knight thought the same dynamic would apply – that he would tell his coachees in a respectful and clear way what they were doing right and wrong. Although there are some situations where a teacher needs to know exactly how something should be done, Knight realized that in the endlessly challenging world of classrooms, top-down feedback is often ineffective. He quotes Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall: “Telling people what we think of their performance doesn’t help them thrive and excel, and telling people how we think they should improve actually *hinders* learning.”

Buckingham and Goodall believe there are three misconceptions that encourage coaches and administrators to use top-down coaching:

- Teachers are unaware of their weaknesses and need to have them pointed out.
- Learning is like filling up an empty vessel.
- The knowledge base about effective teaching can be transferred from one person to another.

This “oversimplifies the complexities of the classroom and positions teachers as passive receivers of knowledge,” says Knight.

A better way, he has come to believe, is the teacher and instructional coach looking together, as equals, at information from the classroom – perhaps observation notes or student work. “The coach shouldn’t tell the teacher what data mean,” says Knight, “but ask questions and listen, trying to think *with* the teacher.”

[“Should Coaches Give Feedback? It’s Complicated”](#) by Jim Knight in the ASCD website, May 1, 2023; Knight can be reached at jimknight@mac.com.

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6. Two Approaches to Making Education Rigorous Again

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Kevin Gannon (Queens University, Charlotte, NC) reports that many instructors have been dealing with “a stunning level of student disconnection” in the wake of the pandemic. “Discussion topics that used to trigger lively conversations now simply earn us blank stares,” he says. Many students are “ghosting out” of their classes – just not showing up.

One response has been “tips and tricks” – for example, three ways to improve participation in class discussions. But there’s also a lot of talk about a “return to rigor” and “restoring standards” after the well-meaning relaxation of accountability and expectations during Covid-19. Gannon believes there are two quite different approaches to increasing rigor:

- Adding more reading and writing assignments, making exams longer, grading more strictly, monitoring attendance, enforcing deadlines, and grading on a curve to limit the number of As;
- Making the course content and pedagogy more intellectually challenging by asking students to engage in material that is sophisticated, complex, and theoretical and challenging them to question their prior assumptions.

Some people think the first approach – giving students more work and grading harshly – is the way to make a course cognitively challenging. Not so, says Gannon.

The first approach, he believes, “uncouples the notion of rigor from any meaningful act of learning” and has profound equity implications, often crushing students who aren’t already high-achieving and adept at navigating “the unofficial rules, routines, and structures” of the academic world. Surveys show that students interpret the word rigor in just this way – being loaded up with more work that has little to do with the richer intellectual content.

“It’s time to abandon punitive and unhelpful conceptions of ‘rigor’ and be rightfully skeptical of claims that being ‘tougher’ is somehow the solution to student disengagement,” says Gannon. The first step, he believes, is thinking in terms of *challenge* rather than *rigor* and figuring out how to balance structure and compassion. “When we take steps to make a course more challenging,” he concludes, “the ideal litmus test is simple: Does this advance learning?”

[“Why a ‘Return to Rigor’ Is Wrong”](#) by Kevin Gannon in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 9, 2023 (Vol. 69, #20, pp. 46-47); Gannon can be reached at kevingannonclasses@gmail.com.

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7. Retrieval Practice in a High-School Biology Class

In this *Teach Like a Champion* website article, Doug Lemov describes a Georgia AP biology teacher’s lesson on cellular respiration (the article includes a brief video of the teacher interacting with his students). Lemov points out four key characteristics of the teacher’s use of retrieval practice:

- *No resources* – The teacher delivers a brief review lecture on material they’ve covered and asks students to fill in a diagram from memory – which highlights gaps in their knowledge

they may have been overconfident about. He gives them a word bank to refresh their memories and starts cold-calling.

- *Desirable difficulty* – The teacher starts with simple but challenging recall questions and gradually increases the difficulty level. His goal is for students to store the factual information in long-term memory so they can apply it to the kind of higher-order thinking they’ll have to do on the AP biology test.

- *Feedback* – The teacher corrects wrong answers and pushes students to improve on incomplete responses. “Students need to know if they missed a question and what the correct answer is,” says Lemov. “We don’t want students to store incorrect information in their long-term memory!”

- *Metacognition* – Students are prodded to reflect on how the information they’re recalling fits into the bigger picture. The teacher asks, “What questions do you have?” to probe for gaps in students’ knowledge.

[“Turning Understanding Into Memory: Steve Kuninsky’s Retrieval Practice”](#) by Doug Lemov in *Teach Like a Champion* website, June 7, 2023

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8. Insights on Artificial Intelligence

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Hollis Robbins (University of Utah) says that with recent developments in artificial intelligence (AI), “the ground is shifting under our feet.” A few of her observations (quoted verbatim):

- AI knows more than any one person knows, but every person knows things that AI does not know.
- Education is still a matter of teaching people how to access information and how to turn information into knowledge.
- Methods of organizing and systematizing information are becoming more important; catalogs, canons, and curated lists will become more valuable.
- The textbook industry should be worried.
- The written essay will no longer be the default for student assessment.
- Specific and local cultural knowledge will become more valuable.
- Experiential learning will become the norm. Everyone will need an internship.
- Employers will want assurances that a new graduate can follow directions, complete tasks, demonstrate judgment.

[“17 Notes on Academic AI”](#) by Hollis Robbins in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 9, 2023 (Vol. 69, #20, p. 19); Robbins can be reached at hollis.robbsins@utah.edu.

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9. Including Essential Latino History in the Curriculum

This review of high-school U.S. history textbooks, authored by Johns Hopkins University and UnidosUS, is critical of the uneven coverage of Latino history. The authors

suggest ten seminal events that should be included in any high-school U.S. history course:

- Spanish exploration, conquest, and colonization – 1513-1776
- Texas independence and the Mexican-American War – 1836-1848
- Spanish-American War – 1898
- The Panama Canal and Zone – 1850-present
- 20th-century Latino legal cases – 1947-1982
- Modern civil rights movement – 1950s-1980s
- Cold war politics and Latin America – 1954-1990
- American purchases and foreign policy in Latin America – 1819-2019
- Hispanic/Latino firsts – 1821-present
- Immigration issues and current events – 1920s-present

[“Analyzing Inclusion in Latino Contributions in U.S. History Curricula in High School,”](#) Johns Hopkins University and UnidosUS, May 2023

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10. Recommended Children’s Books with Multiracial Characters

In this *Kappan* article, April Vazquez (University of Delaware/Newark) shares a list of books featuring multiracial characters:

- *Abby Spencer Goes to Bollywood* by Varsha Bajaj – Indian and white
- *Absolutely Almost* by Lisa Graff – Korean and white
- *Becoming Naomi León* by Pam Muñoz Ryan – Mexican and white
- *Bird* by Chrystal Chan – Jamaican and Mexican
- *Blended* by Sharon Draper – Black and white
- *The Blossoming Universe of Violet Diamond* by Brenda Woods – Black and white
- *Brendon Buckley’s Universe and Everything In It* by Sundee Frazier – Black and white
- *Caterpillar Summer* by Gillian McDunn – Black and white
- *Dream On, Amber* by Emma Shevah – Italian and Japanese
- *Dust from Old Bones* by Sandra Forrester – Black and white
- *Five Things About Ava Andrews* by Margaret Dilloway – Japanese and white
- *Full Cicada Moon* by Marilyn Hilton – Black and Japanese
- *Hold Fast* by Blue Balliett – Black and white
- *Karma Khullar’s Mustache* by Kristi Wientge – Indian and white
- *Keep It Together, Keiko Carter* by Debbi Michiko Florence – Japanese and white
- *Lupe Wong Won’t Dance* by Donna Barba Higuera – Chinese and Mexican
- *The Other Half of Happy* by Rebecca Balcárcel – Guatemalan and white
- *The Other Half of My Heart* by Sundee Frazier – Black and white
- *Prairie Lotus* by Linda Sue Park – Chinese and white
- *Rain Is Not My Indian Name* by Cynthia Leitich Smith – Native American and white
- *The Science of Breakable Things* by Tae Keller – Korean and white
- *See You in the Cosmos* by Jack Cheng – Filipino and white
- *The Sky at Our Feet* by Nadia Hashimi – Afghan and white

- *Somewhere Along* by Annie Donwerth-Chikamatsu – Japanese and white
- *Step Up to the Plate, Maria Singh* by Uma Krishnaswami – Indian and Mexican
- *This is Just a Test* by Madelyn Rosenberg and Wendy Wan-Long Shang – Chinese and Jewish
- *A Thousand Questions* by Saadia Faruqi – Pakistani and white
- *What the Moon Saw* by Laurie Resau – Mexican and white
- *The Whole Story of Half a Girl* by Veera Hiranandani – Indian and Jewish

[“The Magic of Seeing Yourself in Books”](#) by April Vazquez in *Kappan*, May 2023 (Vol. 104, #8, pp. 52-55); Vazquez can be reached at aprilv@udel.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 48 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
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