

# Marshall Memo 843

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education  
June 29, 2020

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## Quotes of the Week

“The pandemic is one season in our lives; it will end. It will be remembered as an extraordinarily difficult time. But the slow process of returning to a new normal – of naming our grief, helping one another reach acceptance, and finding meaning – will continue.”

David Kessler (see item #1)

“Reading out loud forces me to forget everything else for an hour. Immersed in a book, there is no pandemic, no rampant unemployment, nor is the country divided. I am on an amusement ride, totally engrossed in a different world.”

Firoozeh Dumas (see item #3)

“People are understandably concerned about academic backslide. But before we rush to catch students up to pre-quarantine goals, we need to understand what’s happened and where it leaves our students... Instead of succumbing to pressure to ‘catch up’ quickly, students will need us to help them regain some of what they’ve lost: community, meaningful experiences beyond their homes, interactions with peers, and a chance to belong. As teachers, we’re in a uniquely strong position to recover those important things.”

Ariel Sacks in [“Teaching in the Fall: Get Ready to Meet Students Where They Are”](#)  
in *Education Week Teacher*, June 23, 2020

“Learning mathematics is not a predictable process that always leads to a correct, complete answer on the first attempt.”

Crystal Kalinec-Craig and Rose Ann Robles (see item #4)

“Be quick to laugh and smile. Delight in the absurdity of life and in the jokes you hear. A life devoid of humor is not only less joyful – it’s also less productive and less creative.”

Brad Bitterly and Alison Wood Brooks (see item #5)

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## 1. The Pandemic and Six Stages of Grief

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, David Kessler (co-author with Elizabeth Kübler-Ross of *On Grief and Grieving*) says that amid the profound disruptions of the Covid-19 crisis there's a lot of grief. People need "to name what they feel," he says, "so they can start to manage it." The emotions that often accompany grief are denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and acceptance. People won't necessarily experience them in that sequence, and they may not have all five, but the categories are useful in understanding and coming to terms with grief.

"As people go back to work," says Kessler, "or as those who've stayed on the job through the crisis begin to interact with returning workers, many will still be grieving. Not everyone will be at the same stage at the same time... If people seem unusually angry, we should give them space and exercise patience. They are grieving. Someone who questions the pandemic statistics may be in denial – and grieving." We may feel sad and tell ourselves that's not right because others have much more to be sad about. That may be true, says Kessler, but we should go ahead and experience our own sadness. Only by processing grief can we arrive at the fifth stage, acceptance. "There, unsurprisingly, is where the power is," he says, "because we are no longer fighting the truth. This awful thing has happened. Now what?"

Kessler says it's helpful if leaders recognize that colleagues will fall into three groups, and each will need understanding and different kinds of support:

- *The worried well* – These colleagues are healthy and haven't experienced sickness around them, but they're concerned and may be grieving the loss of normalcy, opportunities, projects they were excited about, weddings, graduations, holiday gatherings, vacation trips, and other joys. The worried well may anticipate future losses and deprivations; some are minimizers, playing down the severity of problems, while others are maximizers – the sky is falling. "The truth lies somewhere between the two points of view," says Kessler. "Work helps each group balance their minds."

- *The affected* – They got Covid-19 themselves or know someone who was sick, perhaps still is. "These people haven't just imagined trauma," says Kessler, "they've experienced it. They will benefit from accommodation and validation. Some may need counseling and other support mechanisms."

- *The bereaved* – They're grieving the death of a loved one, are grappling with the stages of grief, and are far from acceptance.

Kessler believes that being aware of these categories is helpful when leaders orchestrate group interactions. It's not a good idea to have a *worried well minimizer* saying, "So we had to

work from home for a couple of months – so what?” to colleagues who were sick or experienced a loss. Knowing who is in which category also makes leaders more sensitive as they engage with co-workers. Studies have found that one of the most important variables in people’s happiness in a workplace is how they are treated in difficult times: *When my loved one died, my boss did this very thoughtful thing. My supervisor invited me into her office and asked, “How are you doing today? How can I support you?”*

Kübler-Ross died in 2004 and Kessler carried on their work on the five stages, always with a sense (shared by her) that the fifth stage – *acceptance* – didn’t really represent closure. Then in 2016, Kessler’s younger son died unexpectedly. Devastated, he stayed home for weeks. “It felt as brutal as I could ever have imagined,” he says. Eventually Kessler formulated a sixth stage of grief – *meaning* – and got the approval of Kübler-Ross’s family and foundation to add it to the canonical list.

“I’m not talking about finding meaning *in* a terrible event,” he says. “Rather, meaning is what you find, and what you make, *after* it. That won’t make it seem worth the cost. It will never be worth the cost. But meaning can heal painful memories and help us keep moving forward... I believe that many of us will be looking for this sixth stage in the wake of the pandemic.” It might take many forms:

- Remembering joy that something or someone gave you before Covid-19 hit;
- Gratitude – for example, for first responders during the pandemic;
- Turning the loss into something positive for others;
- Moments and actions that heal, if only a little.

“Meaning may take time,” says Kessler. “It will be personal (only you can find your own meaning).”

We have a tendency to see loss as a test of our fortitude: can we escape the feelings that it creates? “But loss just happens,” says Kessler. “There’s no test – there’s just grieving. Meaning is what we make happen after.” He suspects that with the pandemic, because we’re all in it together and it’s lasted so long, meaning will come before too long. “If we acknowledge that in this crisis, in our work, something meaningful happened for us and others, we are healing. We are moving forward in our grief.”

Kessler’s conclusion: “I sincerely hope that for you, meaning comes soon, if it hasn’t already. I hope that work becomes a place where people find it – where coworkers support one another and where managers take care of their workers and allow them to grieve. The pandemic is one season in our lives; it will end. It will be remembered as an extraordinarily difficult time. But the slow process of returning to a new normal – of naming our grief, helping one another reach acceptance, and finding meaning – will continue. For leaders that moment will be an opportunity.”

[“Helping Your Team Heal”](#) by David Kessler in *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 2020 (Vol. 98, #4, pp. 53-55)

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## 2. Thomas Guskey on Low-Stakes Teacher-Made Assessments in the Fall

(Originally titled “When School Is Back in Session, Where Will We Begin?”)

In this *Educational Leadership Exclusive*, Thomas Guskey (University of Kentucky) echoes many educators’ concerns about learning gaps when schools resume: the usual “summer slide” will be compounded by students’ uneven experiences with remote instruction during the pandemic. Reject test companies’ offers of free assessments, Guskey advises: “Although seemingly altruistic, this is likely simply a clever business strategy.” Schools will have to buy companies’ assessments to measure progress down the road. Besides, he says, commercial assessments have an uneven track record with curriculum alignment.

A better approach, says Guskey, is short, teacher-made quizzes and prompts to assess prerequisite skills and knowledge for initial curriculum units. “This shouldn’t take much time and could be seen as a natural part of teachers’ planning for the coming year,” he says. “Because these will be low-stakes assessments, they don’t have to be psychometrically perfect.”

Principals play an important part: giving teacher teams time to craft assessments, ensuring standards alignment, using district assessment experts, and making sure teachers follow up with corrective instruction for lagging students, with proficient students going deeper into the curriculum or tutoring classmates. Guskey sums up the benefits of this quick assessment/mastery approach:

- Right from the start, teachers get the information they need to plan instruction.
- Students build a foundation for later mastery, countering incoming inequities.
- Mastery of key skills early in the year is a powerful motivator and confidence-builder, especially for struggling students.

[“When School Is Back in Session, Where Will We Begin?”](#) by Thomas Guskey in *ASCD Online*, June 22, 2020; Guskey can be reached at [guskey@uky.edu](mailto:guskey@uky.edu).

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## 3. A Virtual Readaloud Book Club

In this *New York Times* article, author Firoozeh Dumas remembers that when she immigrated from Iran and enrolled in a California elementary school, she knew only seven words of English: white, yellow, orange, red, blue, green, and purple. Despite the language barrier, Dumas loved her second-grade classroom, with children’s artwork hanging on the walls and small gifts from Mrs. Sandberg, the teacher, for completing assignments – quite a contrast from her teachers in Iran, who “ruled with fear.”

Recess was a less positive experience, especially the monkey bars, because of Dumas’s lack of upper-body strength. One day her friends boosted her to the top of the structure and when recess ended, Dumas couldn’t get down. Mrs. Sandberg came out and, with the whole class watching, coaxed her into jumping into the teacher’s outstretched arms.

The best part of each day was when students folded their arms on their desks and rested their heads while Mrs. Sandberg read to them. “Her kind and steady voice,” Dumas remembers, “transported me to magical places where animals could talk and where kids, far

braver than I, and probably with upper-body strength, had grand adventures... During story hour, I could have a joyful childhood. I was not an outsider, or a child worried about her mother who didn't speak English." At the end of second grade, Dumas got an award for perfect attendance, "not because I never got sick, but because I refused to stay home and miss story hour."

Early in the Covid-19 school shutdown, Dumas was invited to read via Zoom to a group of fifth graders. She accepted with enthusiasm, dubbing her weekly group *The Coronavirus Book Club: Reading Is Contagious!* Only a few students showed up at first, and getting them to ask questions was like pulling teeth. Dumas started singing opera songs badly and threatened to keep singing until students asked questions. Gradually they opened up, and more and more students joined the group. When the school year ended, there was a unanimous vote to keep the group going during the summer.

"Reading out loud forces me to forget everything else for an hour," says Dumas. "Immersed in a book, there is no pandemic, no rampant unemployment, nor is the country divided. I am on an amusement ride, totally engrossed in a different world." She wonders if Mrs. Sandberg's post-lunch reading hour gave her a chance to forget her world. It was 1972, with the Vietnam War raging, terrorists attacking in Munich, the Watergate scandal unfolding, and demonstrations in the streets.

Dumas wishes she could pick up the phone and thank Mrs. Sandberg for the many gifts she bestowed, including the playground rescue, and tell her about the book club – but she's passed on. Instead, Dumas thanks all the teachers who have performed so well during the pandemic. "What you are doing now was never a part of your job descriptions," she says, "and we know that. You will always be remembered, and that is a legacy reserved for heroes."

["Why I Created a Book Club for Fifth Graders"](#) by Firoozeh Dumas in *The New York Times*, June 20, 2020

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#### **4. Students' Rights in a Fifth-Grade Math Class**

In this article in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, Crystal Kalinec-Craig (University of Texas/San Antonio) and Rose Ann Robles (a fifth-grade teacher in the San Antonio Independent School District) note that many classrooms have posters with mathematics rules, procedures, and vocabulary. They've developed an alternative: four "Rights of the Learner." Implemented in Robles's classroom with students who were afraid to make mistakes and try out ideas, the Rights aim to empower students and get them doing more of the heavy lifting. Here they are:

- #1: *The right to be confused* – This doesn't mean that students thrash around aimlessly; it's about "productive struggle," grappling with problems, working to make sense of something that's not immediately clear. The best problems help students clarify, refine, or expand their existing mathematics knowledge.

- #2: *The right to claim a mistake* – "Learning mathematics is not a predictable process that always leads to a correct, complete answer on the first attempt," say Kalinec-Craig and

Robles. Students need to know that missteps and mistakes are an indispensable part of their learning. During class, students engage in “rough-draft thinking – false starts, expressions of uncertainty, and incomplete or imperfect sentences.”

- #3: *The right to speak, listen, and be heard* – In the best math classes, students “share what they know, ask questions about their own thinking, and/or express curiosity about the thinking of another...” This is especially helpful for English language learners, who can draw on their existing knowledge and use cognates to build understanding of mathematics in their new language.

- #4: *The right to write, do, and represent what makes sense* – Mathematics isn’t “a universal set of notations, algorithms, and representations,” say Kalinec-Craig and Robles – there are variations around the world. “When teachers support their students to write, do, and represent what makes sense to them, they redistribute power and mathematical sense-making to their students.” Students work with classmates to try multiple solution strategies, and teachers check in to better understand their students’ thought processes, often getting new insights into mathematics.

[“Classroom Rules Reimagined as the Rights of the Learner”](#) by Crystal Kalinec-Craig and Rose Ann Robles in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, June 2020 (Vol. 113, #6, pp. 468-473); the authors can be reached at [crystal.kalinec-craig@utsa.edu](mailto:crystal.kalinec-craig@utsa.edu) and [rrobles3@saisd.net](mailto:rrobles3@saisd.net).

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## **5. Humor in the Workplace: What Works and What Doesn’t**

“Humor at work is a delicate dance, and humor research is still in its infancy,” say Brad Bitterly (University of Michigan) and Alison Wood Brooks (Harvard Business School) in this *Harvard Business Review* article. But there are studies indicating that effective use of humor – and a workplace culture that encourages it – “helps build interpersonal trust and high-quality work relationships and influence behaviors and attitudes that matter to leadership effectiveness, including employee performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and creativity.” Leaders who use humor well are seen as more intelligent, skilled, and confident, and they often move up in their organizations. Ineffective or tasteless humor does the opposite; it can even cost leaders their jobs.

Bitterly and Brooks’s biggest insight: *context matters*. They offer the following advice on when (and whether) to use six types of humor as part of a leadership repertoire:

- *Inside jokes* – These signal closeness and camaraderie, making people feel good about being part of an in-group, while implicitly excluding an out-group. But in-jokes can make colleagues feel ostracized, say Bitterly and Brooks: “When group cohesion is important, tell jokes that everyone can understand.”

- *Sarcasm* – Surprisingly, studies have shown that being sarcastic (versus saying just what you mean) boosts creativity in groups. This may be because saying one thing when you mean the opposite involves higher-level thinking and amps up the level of discourse. But the risks of being misunderstood or causing offense are high. “The lesson,” say Bitterly and

Brooks: “tone it down with new colleagues, in unfamiliar settings, or when working in teams where strong relationships haven’t yet been built. Until you’ve established trust, it’s best to communicate with respect.”

- *Self-deprecation* – When people reveal unfavorable information about themselves with humor, they come across as warm and competent and may successfully deflect criticism. In 1958, John F. Kennedy was dealing with the accusation that his wealthy father was buying the presidential election for him, and had this to say at the Gridiron dinner: “I just received the following wire from my generous daddy: ‘Dear Jack, don’t buy a single vote more than is necessary. I’ll be damned if I’m going to pay for a landslide.’” But it’s unwise to use self-deprecation with serious matters, say Bitterly and Brooks, and people shouldn’t joke about their core competencies.

- *Finessing difficult situations* – When confronted with a tough question, people can respond by lying, saying truthful things in a deliberately misleading way, responding with a question, or remaining silent. But humor can charm and distract the audience and can be effective (though it’s wise to have a serious answer if you’re pressed). During his reelection campaign, President Ronald Reagan was asked about his age (72) during a debate with Walter Mondale. Reagan’s response: “I will not make age an issue in this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent’s youth and inexperience.” Reagan not only won over the audience, but signaled that he was still mentally sharp.

- *Delivering negative feedback* – This can be a problem, since couching criticism in a joking manner can soften its impact, making the recipient think it’s benign and not meant seriously. But on certain occasions, humor can enhance a stinging rebuke, as when Abraham Lincoln, perturbed that General George McClellan had failed to attack the Confederate army in Richmond, wrote this to his general: “If you don’t want to use the army, I should like to borrow it for a while.”

- *As a coping mechanism* – Studies have shown that humor is an effective way to distract from and lessen burdens when you are close with the members of a group going through something difficult. American prisoners of war in Vietnam used humor to help them get through a very tough situation. But the type and timing of humor matter; negative, mean-spirited jokes when feelings are raw make people feel worse.

Bitterly and Brooks return to their initial caveat, with these details: “Context matters. Conversational dynamics can vary profoundly from culture to culture, person to person, and group to group. These factors are tricky to navigate and make it difficult – even in the moment – to know whether your humor attempt has been successful or not. Many people will laugh politely even if something isn’t funny or is in poor taste, creating an unreliable feedback loop.” Not everyone can carry off humor, and if it’s not your thing, they advise, at least enjoy effective humor in others: “Be quick to laugh and smile. Delight in the absurdity of life and in the jokes you hear. A life devoid of humor is not only less joyful – it’s also less productive and less creative.”

[“Sarcasm, Self-Deprecation, and Inside Jokes: A User’s Guide to Humor at Work”](#) by Brad

Bitterly and Alison Wood Brooks in *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 2020 (Vol. 98, #4, pp. 96-103); Bitterly is at [bitterly@umich.edu](mailto:bitterly@umich.edu).

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## 6. Toxic Team Members

“The strongest predictor of a team’s performance is the bad apple on the team,” says Dan Rockwell in this *Leadership Freak* article. Rockwell uses the Big Five (OCEAN) personality traits to pinpoint where a negative team member can spoil things [see Memo 842 for a fuller discussion of these traits]:

- Openness to experience – tries new things, is intellectually curious, pursues creative ideas;
- Conscientiousness – pursues achievement, loves to finish things, feels responsible to the team, is organized and dependable;
- Extroversion – talks and thinks at the same time, is energized by social interactions, is comfortable taking risks;
- Agreeableness – is willing to set aside personal interests for the team, enjoys harmony, spends time helping others;
- Neuroticism – leans toward depressed moods, often feels anxiety, envy, anger, or guilt, feels stress more frequently and deeply than others.

The best teams, says Rockwell, have members who are highly conscientious and agreeable, and low on neuroticism. “The strongest predictor of team performance,” he cautions, “is the bad apple, not the average of all the apples on the team. One neurotic team member has more negative impact than a group of optimistic team members.” He has these suggestions for dealing with a negative member of a team:

- Work to understand them.
- Provide direct feedback.
- Accept that they may not change.
- Minimize their exposure to others.
- Spend time with the good apples.

[“How to Minimize the Damage of One Bad Apple”](#) by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, June 25, 2020

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## 7. Award-Winning Children’s Books

In this feature in *Social Education*, Amy Adkins reports on the Carter G. Woodson Book Awards and Honorees for 2020 (cover images and reviews at the link below):

Elementary:

- *The Undefeated* by Kwame Alexander and Kadir Nelson (Versify)
- *Todos Iguales/All Equal: Un Corrido de Lemon Grove/A Ballad of Lemon Grove* by Christy Hale (Children’s Book Press)

- *Carter Reads the Newspaper* by Deborah Hopkinson, illustrated by Don Tate (Peachtree Publishers)

Middle/Secondary:

- *Infinite Hope: A Black Artist's Journey from World War II to Peace*, an autobiography by Ashley Bryan (Atheneum Books for Young Readers)
- *The Promise of Change: One Girl's Story in the Fight for School Equality* by Jo Ann Allen Boyce and Debbie Levy (Bloomsbury Children's Books)
- *Accused! The Trials of The Scottsboro Boys: Lies, Prejudice, and the Fourteenth Amendment* by Larry Dane Brimmer (Calkins Creek)

In a companion feature in *Social Education*, Amy Adkins reports on the Septima Clark Women in Literature Awards and Honorees for 2020 (cover images and reviews at the link below):

Elementary:

- *Rise! From Caged Bird to Poet of the People, Maya Angelou* by Bethany Hegedus, illustrations by Tonya Engel (Lee & Low Books)
- *Instructions Not Included: How a Team of Women Coded the Future* by Tami Lewis Brown and Debbie Loren Dunn (Disney Hyperion)
- *Girls with Guts! The Road to Breaking Barriers and Bashing Records* by Debbie Gonzales and Rebecca Gibbon (Charlesbridge)

Middle/Secondary:

- *Reaching for the Moon: The Autobiography of NASA Mathematician Katherine Johnson* by Katherine Johnson (Simon and Schuster)
- *Soaring Earth: A Companion Memoir to Enchanted Air* by Margarita Engle (Atheneum Books for Young Readers)
- *Taking Cover: One Girl's Story of Growing Up During the Iranian Revolution* by Nioucha Homayoonfar (National Geographic)

See also this extended list of [Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People](#) for 2020.

[“The Carter G. Woodson Book Awards, 2020”](#) and [“The Septima Clark Women in Literature Awards, 2020”](#) by Ann Adkins in *Social Education*, May/June 2020 (Vol. 84, #3, pp. 161-166)

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## 8. Short Item:

[Virtual School Day and Virtual Summer Camps](#) – Missouri-based Varsity Tutors is offering these services free during the pandemic. For more information, contact Lucy Crouppen at [lcrouppen@varsitytutors.com](mailto:lcrouppen@varsitytutors.com).

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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 50 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.

## ***Subscriptions:***

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

## ***Website:***

If you go to <http://www.marshallmemo.com> you will find detailed information on:

- How to subscribe or renew
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- Article selection criteria
- Topics (with a running count of articles)
- Headlines for all issues
- Reader opinions
- About Kim Marshall (bio, writings, consulting)
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- The current issue (in Word and PDF)
- All back issues (Word and PDF) and podcasts
- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 16+ 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  
District Management Journal  
Ed. Magazine  
Education Digest  
Education Next  
Education Update  
Education Week  
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis  
Educational Horizons  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Edutopia  
Elementary School Journal  
English Journal  
Essential Teacher  
Exceptional Children  
Go Teach  
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  
Knowledge Quest  
Language Arts  
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)  
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12  
Middle School Journal  
Peabody Journal of Education  
Phi Delta Kappan  
Principal  
Principal Leadership  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Responsive Classroom Newsletter  
Rethinking Schools  
Review of Educational Research  
School Administrator  
School Library Journal  
Social Education  
Social Studies and the Young Learner  
Teachers College Record  
Teaching Children Mathematics  
Teaching Exceptional Children  
The Atlantic  
The Chronicle of Higher Education  
The Education Gadfly  
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 Magazine