Marshall Memo 996

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 24, 2023

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"When you enter an organization as its new leader, forget about plotting out the first 90 days. Focus on the first 90 hours."

John Quelch (see item #1)

"I don't care what your personal mission statement says. Everyone in the building knows what you're about by how you spend your time."

Danny Steele, quoted in "Prioritizing Instructional Leadership" in Principal's Playbook

"When was the last time you divided a polynomial?"

Jo Boaler (Stanford University) quoted in "In California, a Math Problem: Does Data Science = Algebra II?" by Amy Harmon in *The New York Times*, July 13, 2023, on the controversy around a proposed curriculum revision that would allow high schools to substitute data science for Algebra II

"I would tell Justice Roberts, You know, it's really easy to say, 'Tell your story about how race has shaped your lived experience.' There are grown-ups who write entire books about that, and now you're asking a 17-year-old to describe their experience in 650 words or less. That's a tall order, and it's a burden only on certain students."

Anna Ivey (quoted in item #4)

"Given what this person had, what did this person accomplish? Given the access provided, what did this person do with it?"

Rafael Walker on *resourcefulness* as a college admission criterion (see item #5)

"In the wake of the Supreme Court decision that struck down race-conscious admissions, we should recognize that, in practice, affirmative action mattered a great deal for very few and very little for most."

Richard Arum and Mitchell Stevens (see item #6)

1. Hitting the Ground Running in a Leadership Position

"When you enter an organization as its new leader, forget about plotting out the first 90 days. Focus on the first 90 hours," says John Quelch (Harvard Business School and University of Miami) in this article in *HBS Working Knowledge*. "Because you don't get a second chance to make a first impression." Here are his recommendations for a quick, decisive start:

• *Do the homework*. Before your first day on the job, do as much fact-finding about the organization as you can. Visit several times to talk to key people, and if possible, defer your start day to allow time for reconnaissance. What are the organization's strong and weak points? Who are the key players (including those who might have been competitors for your job)? What is the track record of recent leaders? When you arrive, you should have a tentative game plan – but be ready for the unexpected. "Remember," says Quelch, "there will always be surprises once you start turning over the rocks."

• *Make sure your boss has your back*. It's entirely possible that once you start making changes, some subordinates will go over your head with comments like, "This new leader seems very smart but just doesn't understand us." Give superiors a heads-up for this kind of behavior and ask them not to engage with complainers.

• *Identify key talent*. Some subordinates who tell you how lucky the organization is to have you as a leader and offer to help you succeed "are often fakes," says Quelch. "The people you need to impress and enlist as supporters are not wasting time welcoming you. They're getting the job done." You need to quickly identify and talk to the high performers.

• *Form your leadership team*. This should be a combination of seasoned professionals and new blood, says Quelch. It should be in place by the end of your second week and meeting regularly by the third. The implicit message to your new colleagues is that you respect past accomplishments and can spot talented up-and-comers. It's not a good idea to bring in cronies from your previous job, says Quelch: "Give incumbents a chance to prove (or disprove) themselves. You can always make additional changes three months in."

• *Signal your values*. This might be by cutting a frivolous expense item, replacing worn-out furniture in the reception area, or making a point of talking to employees at the bottom of the pyramid who have been ignored in the past.

• *Get the right support staff*. Your top assistant needs to reflect your values and style and be unquestionably loyal, says Quelch. "My preference is to employ people who are polite but firm, welcoming but professional… Remember that the person you appoint to staff your office will signal, rightly or wrongly, your views on diversity, equity, and inclusion."

• *Hold a town hall meeting for the entire organization*. This is a must by the end of your second week, says Quelch. "It's a chance for you to share a little bit of information about yourself and your values, why you took the job, and how much you respect the contributions of your predecessor and everyone else present, all of whom made this leadership opportunity so exciting… Don't throw out too many new ideas at once. Every organization has limited absorption capacity when it comes to change."

Quelch closes with three mistakes to avoid while getting the lay of the land in the first 90 hours:

- Don't hire anyone without vetting them with multiple insiders.
- Don't announce a change in brand name or logo. This will give skeptics a chance to take potshots at your leadership.
- Don't accept early speaking engagements or engage in lengthy e-mail exchanges about strategy and personnel decisions.

"The First 90 Hours: What New CEOs Should – and Shouldn't – Do to Set the Right Tone" by John Quelch in *HBS Working Knowledge*, April 11, 2023

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2. What Should Your Ideal Graduate Know and Be Able to Do?

In this *GOA Insights* article, Eric Hudson says it's a good idea for schools to describe the skills and habits of mind graduates should master to be successful in college, career, and life. For example, in 2016, Global Online Academy decided on six core learner competencies:

- Communicate and empathize with people who have different perspectives from yours.
- Collaborate with people who don't share your location.
- Curate and create content relevant to real-world issues.
- Reflect on and take responsibility for your learning and that of others.
- Organize your time and tasks to learn independently.
- Leverage digital tools to support and show your learning.

At GOA, says Hudson, these six goals drive curriculum design, instruction, and assessment.

For schools creating or fine-tuning their graduate profile (a.k.a. portrait of a graduate), he suggests the following steps:

• *Understand the rationale*. A graduate profile is a public, aspirational commitment of how the school defines success for its students, says Hudson, "rather than accept grades or test scores or accumulated credits as evidence of learning."

• *Align the profile to research and mission*. Graduate profiles should identify 4-8 cognitive and non-cognitive competencies that are "transferable, transdisciplinary, and relevant to the world beyond school," he says. "Selecting the individual elements for your profile is an opportunity to explore where your school's mission and values intersect with relevant research. As part of this process, schools examine student work from the classroom and beyond; identify and analyze experiences, rituals, and systems that represent them at their best, and consider their school's history and strategic initiatives."

• *Engage all stakeholders*. Creating a graduate profile has implications for all parts of a school community, says Hudson, so outreach is vital: teachers, students, families, alumni, and other key groups need to be involved in brainstorming ideas, drafting the document, and having ownership of the final portrait.

• *Commit to strategic implementation*. Developing a graduate profile should be the first step in a multi-year effort to bring curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in line with big-picture goals. The profile can serve as a rubric for continuous checking-in and fine-tuning of the school's work, says Hudson, "an integral part of the way people perceive, talk about, and experience your school. It can be a bridge between your mission and your program, helping your community and the world beyond your school understand the vision and goals you have for your students."

"Designing a Graduate Profile: Four Essential Steps" by Eric Hudson in *GOA Insights*, July 11, 2023

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3. Psychological Safety 101

This McKinsey & Company Explainer defines psychological safety as "the absence of interpersonal fear… feeling safe to take interpersonal risks, to speak up, to disagree openly, to surface concerns without fear of negative repercussions or pressure to sugarcoat bad news." Numerous studies have shown that a psychologically safe environment supports creativity, learning, innovation, teamwork, employee satisfaction and retention, and better performance.

But psychological safety isn't the norm in most organizations. It emerges when leaders show curiosity and a growth mindset, allow open dialogue, challenge colleagues to perform at higher levels, support their success, listen to input, explore disagreements, and talk through tensions.

Leaders often do a better job addressing the psychological needs of higher-earning colleagues than their lower-status employees. Those in leadership positions need to make a point of attending to the needs of *everyone* in their organization.

Mental health is an important component of psychological safety. McKinsey researchers have identified six leadership actions that promote mental health:

- Reduce stigma and promote diversity and inclusion.
- Implement and actively support employee wellness programs.
- Ensure that healthcare services are equally accessible to all.
- Make services digitally accessible on smartphones, tablets, and fitness trackers.
- Integrate in-person and virtual healthcare delivery.
- Use employee feedback to identify healthcare needs and care preferences.

Times of crisis are when it's most difficult for leaders to promote a psychologically safe workplace. "When faced with uncertainty," says the McKinsey paper, "it's human nature to seek to exert control and take quick action." At moments like these, calm, compassionate,

emotionally intelligent leadership is at a premium. Four qualities are important to mitigating the tendency to overemphasize control and give in to fear:

- Self-awareness;
- Vulnerability;
- Empathy;
- Compassion.

These qualities help leaders keep events in perspective, foster belonging and inclusion, take care of colleagues through compassionate acts, and help everyone imagine a better post-crisis future.

"What Is Psychological Safety?" by McKinsey & Company, July 17, 2023

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4. College Application Essays in a "Colorblind" World

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Eric Hoover says the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision forbidding the use of race as a factor in college admissions is shining a "supercharged spotlight" on students' application essays. That's because Chief Justice John Roberts wrote, "Nothing in this opinion should be construed as prohibiting universities from considering an applicant's discussion of how race affected his or her life, be it through discrimination, inspiration, or otherwise." Roberts went on to say that the leg up given to an applicant who overcame racial discrimination "must be tied to that student's courage and determination" and "that student's unique ability to contribute to the university."

The Supreme Court's mention of the application essay, says Hoover, "has prompted many intense conversations among admissions officers and high-school counselors, who are still assessing the implications for their day-to-day work." The essay will also loom larger in the minds of students hoping to stand out, especially those applying to highly selective institutions. A college official in Maryland said, "We are going to have to educate students about how to write about who they are in a very different way than we do now."

Many colleges don't require essays, says Hoover. More than half of the Common Application's 1,000-plus members don't ask applicants to answer the open-response prompts – and many colleges that have an essay requirement say it doesn't carry much weight. But highly selective colleges do have essay requirements (Stanford has eight in its application), and teenagers naturally have a major emotional and identity investment in what they write in their applications.

In recent years, it's become common for colleges to include questions about adversity and personal hardships. Babson College has used this optional essay prompt: "If you have ever experienced discrimination, in any form, due to your racial, religious, gender, or sexual identity, we welcome you to share that experience in whatever way feels meaningful to you." The University of Indiana at Bloomington required a response (200-400 words) to this invitation: "If you encountered any unusual circumstances, challenges, or obstacles in pursuit of your education, share those experiences and how you overcame them."

Prompts like these, says Hoover, "can read like forced therapy." Other colleges take a lower-key approach with less emphasis on hardships. Duke University's application has included this statement: "If you'd like to share a perspective you bring or experience you've had that would help us understand you better, perhaps a community you belong to or your family or cultural background, we encourage you to do so here." The University of Colorado at Boulder has included this query: "We value difference and support equity and inclusion of all students and their many interesting identities. Pick one of your unique identities and describe its significance."

Alicia Oglesby, a college counselor at a Pittsburgh high school, says that writing about racial experiences and identity can be empowering for some students and traumatic for others. Since the Supreme Court's decision, Oglesby has been pondering how to advise those reluctant students about how to handle their college essays. "I don't know yet," she says.

Sara Urquidez, who advises low-income college applicants in Dallas and Houston, worries that students will believe they need to "sell trauma" and will feel "further tokenized" by essay prompts like these. Many of the students she works with don't recognize the rich diversity of their experiences "because it's normalized where they live, shop, work, go to church. They often don't see their experiences as different or extraordinary, so they are hesitant to write about them because they don't see their story as unique." Will these students be able to use the admissions essay to their advantage?

Anna Ivey, a former University of Chicago Law School dean, has a similar concern. "I would tell Justice Roberts, You know, it's really easy to say, 'Tell your story about how race has shaped your lived experience.' There are grown-ups who write entire books about that, and now you're asking a 17-year-old to describe their experience in 650 words or less. That's a tall order, and it's a burden only on certain students."

In the Supreme Court's decision, Roberts cautioned that colleges can't use information from an essay as a proxy for race. "But how, exactly," asks Hoover, "do admissions officers separate, in their own mind, the fact of an applicant's race and ethnicity from the relevant experiences that they choose to describe in an essay?"

Ericka Matthews-Jackson, director of admissions at Wayne State University, has had to grapple with that very question since the state's 2006 ban on considering race in admissions decisions. "Once race was no longer a factor we could consider," she says, "the most challenging thing was having to evaluate and advocate on behalf of students who didn't have certain opportunities because of their race, but not being able to highlight that race was the reason. You have to do mental gymnastics. The fact that structural racism has been a part of this country since its inception is not something that you can take into consideration, but you know that has impacted the lives of so many of the applicants that are before you."

"The 'Extra Burden' on Application Essays" by Eric Hoover in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 21, 2023 (Vol. 69, #23, pp. 10-13)

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5. A Novel Approach to the College Selection Process

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Rafael Walker (Baruch College, CUNY) says the Supreme Court's decision on affirmative action seems to many like a serious setback, "yet another blow in the salvo against social justice… a win for the wrong side." But with this decision, he believes, there's an opportunity "to reimagine an admissions process grown stale – one conceived for an era considerably different from our own."

Walker's personal experience gave rise to his early concerns about race-based affirmative action. When he won admission to an elite college (and a generous scholarship) after a hardscrabble upbringing, he noticed that most of the other black students were rich. "Given their charmed lives," he says, "it seemed they had come from families in which affirmative action had already done its work, families that had escaped the cycle of socioeconomic oppression bequeathed them by slavery and Jim Crow. I thought it unfair that their race alone entitled them to the same preference in admissions that I had received."

"Racial bias certainly plays a role in determining our opportunities and outcomes," says Walker. "But, as the recent lawsuits make clear, it is time to ask, 'How much?' Now, three generations beyond the inception of affirmative action, we need a metric that takes into account a fuller range of students' opportunities and outcomes, not simply the important but limited criterion of race."

Some advocates have suggested using economic disadvantage as an admissions criterion, but since the majority of the nation's impoverished families are white, there's concern that this approach would not promote racial diversity in universities. In addition, using a single-vector criterion (also true of using race) excludes many deserving students.

Walker has a different idea: *resourcefulness*: "Given what this person had, what did this person accomplish? Given the access provided, what did this person do with it?" He believes using this as a key factor in college admissions has five advantages:

• It's the most "elegant" way to account for obstacles like class, race, disability, family trauma, sexuality, and more. "In its intersectional approach," says Walker, "resourcefulness could account for the role race played in the middle-class black applicant's life, just as it could for the role played by class in the poor white applicant's – along with any other hurdles those applicants had to jump."

• Resourcefulness is less vulnerable to the objection to race-based admissions (including by Chief Justice Roberts): that privileging race in college admissions is racist. "While evaluating resourcefulness would necessarily involve thinking about race," says Walker, "it would do so indirectly and, I think, less crudely: race not as something that in itself makes one applicant more appealing than another but, rather, as something that has left that applicant with more or less resources to work with."

• Resourcefulness might appeal to both ends of the political spectrum. For those on the right, there's an emphasis on meritocracy and pluck. And for the left, social justice would be served by looking at how well individual students have succeeded despite being born into a society in which opportunities are not evenly distributed.

• "If the goal of admissions offices," says Walker, "is to admit students on the basis of the students' capacity to make the most of what they have been given, admissions offices will go a long way in ensuring that their institutions are filled with the most deserving."

• Finally, using resourcefulness would reduce the stigma experienced by many students of color in elite colleges. "Knowing that they were admitted on the basis of their resourcefulness," says Walker, "would be far more gratifying than believing themselves admitted as part of a quota."

"Let's seize this opportunity," he concludes, "to remake the admissions process into something reflecting what we have learned in the decades since affirmative action was introduced. Using the admissions process to assemble resourceful student bodies, rather than quota-compliant ones, may help us do that."

"What Comes After Affirmative Action?" by Rafael Walker in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 21, 2023 (Vol. 69, #23, pp. 32-34); Walker can be reached at Rafael.Walker@baruch.cuny.edu.

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6. Putting the Supreme Court's Affirmative Action Decision in Perspective

In this *New York Times* article, Richard Arum (University of California/Irvine) and Mitchell Stevens (Stanford University) say, "In the wake of the Supreme Court decision that struck down race-conscious admissions, we should recognize that, in practice, affirmative action mattered a great deal for very few and very little for most." That's because most colleges are not very selective (see the graphic in the article link below) and most students of color go to less-selective institutions. Affirmative action "only opened a tiny window of access to America's most elite institutions."

The great majority of students apply to and enroll in colleges near their families, say Arum and Stevens – which frequently do not make the most of students' potential. "We live in a country full of colleges that don't have the resources and academic quality to match their students' talents," they say. The college selection process is an example of "undermatching," and efforts to nudge high-school students to apply to more-challenging colleges further from home have had limited success.

"The current opportunity to bring racial equity to American higher education," conclude Arum and Stevens, "lies in a collective re-commitment to the quality and success of more-accessible institutions… While the Supreme Court's decision is a blow to black and Hispanic students who dream of attending the most competitive universities, improving and better supporting the institutions that serve the lion's share of students of color will do far more to advance the cause of racial equality in this country than anything that admissions officers can do in Cambridge, Palo Alto, and Chapel Hill."

"For Most College Students, Affirmative Action Was Never Enough" by Richard Arum and Mitchell Stevens, graphics by Quoctrung Bui in *The New York Times*, July 3, 2023; the authors can be reached at richard.arum@uci.edu and mitchell.stevens@stanford.edu.

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7. Broadening the Literary Canon on the Jewish Experience

In this *English Journal* article, Heather Matthews (Salisbury University) says most high-school students are exposed to Jewish literary characters who are either victims (Anne Frank) or people with negative characteristics (Shylock demanding a pound of flesh, Fagin abusing orphans). Some schools include *Night* by Elie Wiesel or *Refugee* by Alan Gratz, both of which focus on the Holocaust. Books featuring Jewish characters in positions of resistance are few and far between, as are books about contemporary Judaism. Lurking below the surface are instances of antisemitism; for example, prolific children's book author Roald Dahl was an outspoken antisemite.

In this article, Matthews presents a short curriculum unit on Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* in which students are encouraged to move beyond a "safe space" to a "brave space," thinking critically about their ideas and preconceptions about Jewish culture and history and breaking down ideas about the "otherness" of Jews that exist in the literature they've been exposed to up to that point.

A brave space, says Matthews, "is an environment where students reject such maxims as 'agree to disagree,' instead using the idea of 'controversy with civility,' and challenge the common rule of 'no attacks' by recognizing that attacking an idea, as opposed to launching a personal attack, can begin a worthwhile conversation. In this way, brave spaces allow difficult conversations to be had, without the impulse to stray away from tough emotions in an effort to mitigate discomfort." Creating a brave space depends, of course, on the teacher's skills and rapport with students.

Part of this process, says Matthews, is reading books that portray Jews in a wider range of contexts. She recommends these as replacements or supplements to canonical texts:

<u>Middle-grade literature:</u>

- *Starfish* by Lisa Fipps
- *The Inquisitor's Tale* or *The Three Magical Children and Their Holy Dog* by Adam Gidwitz
- *How to Find What You're Not Looking For* by Veera Hiranandani
- *Linked* by Gordon Korman

<u>Young adult literature:</u>

- *Little and Lion* by Brandy Colbert
- *It's a Whole Spiel: Love, Latkes, and Other Jewish Stories* by Katherine Locke and Laura Silverman
- *The Assignment* by Liza Wiemer

<u>Narrative nonfiction:</u>

- *The School That Escaped the Nazis: The True Story of the Schoolteacher Who Defied Hitler* by Deborah Cadbury
- *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present* by Dara Horn
- *#Antisemitism: Coming of Age During the Resurgence of Hate* by Samantha Vinokor-Meinrath

"The Monstrous Other: Analyzing Jewish Characters in the Literary Canon" by Heather Matthews in *English Journal*, July 2023 (Vol. 112, #6, pp. 48-55); Matthews can be reached at hjmatthews@salisbury.edu; for a further discussion of these issues, see the article by Dara Horn in Memo 983.

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8. Counter-Stereotypical Books About African-American Kids

In this *School Library Journal* article, Cicely Lewis recommends books about the African-American experience that don't dwell on struggle, pain, and hardship (click the link below for cover images and brief summaries):

- *School Trip* by Jerry Craft, grade 4-8
- *Miles Morales Suspended* by Jason Reynolds, illustrated by Zeke Peña, grade 7 and up
- *The Getaway* by Lamar Giles, grade 9 and up
- *The Violin Conspiracy: A Novel* by Brendan Slocumb, adult, suitable for teens
- *Bro at the Buzz* by Elliott Smith, illustrated by Subi Bosa, grade 1-3

"These Black Kids Defy Stereotypes" by Cicely Lewis in *School Library Journal*, July 2023 (Vol. 69. #7, p. 17)

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If you have feedback or suggestions, please e-mail kim.marshall48@gmail.com

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 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 HTMI version as well.

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- An easily searchable archive of all articles so far
- The "classic" articles from all 14 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
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