

# Marshall Memo 155

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education  
October 9, 2006

## In This Issue:

1. Which tools work best to change schools?
2. Leadership advice from a symphony orchestra conductor
3. Successfully facilitating teacher team meetings
4. Getting enough sleep
5. Boy brains and girl brains: what teachers can do
6. Should high schools stop offering Advanced Placement courses?
7. A missing ingredient in the high-school curriculum

## Quotes of the Week

“No organization works if the toilets don’t work.”

James March, Stanford University business professor and consultant  
(Interviewed by Diane Coutu in the *Harvard Business Review*, October 2006, p. 85)

“I’m not a power junkie, I’m a responsibility junkie. If I were in it for the power, I don’t think I could get the orchestra to follow me anywhere.”

Keith Lockhart, Boston Pops conductor (see item #2)

“The primary task of management is to get people to work together in a systematic way. Like orchestra conductors, managers direct the talents and actions of various players to produce a desired result.”

Clayton Christensen, Matt Marx, and Howard Stevenson (see item #1)

“Just as a carpenter would never undertake a job without having the requisite tools in his or her toolbox, a wise manager in a low-consensus environment would not agree to lead a change program without the authority to wield the right power tools.”

Clayton Christensen, Matt Marx, and Howard Stevenson (*ibid.*)

“Consider vision statements. When members of a group agree on what they want to achieve, statements that articulate where the organization needs to go can be energizing and inspiring. But if employees don’t agree about what they want, vision statements won’t help much in changing their behavior – aside from inducing a collective rolling of eyes.”

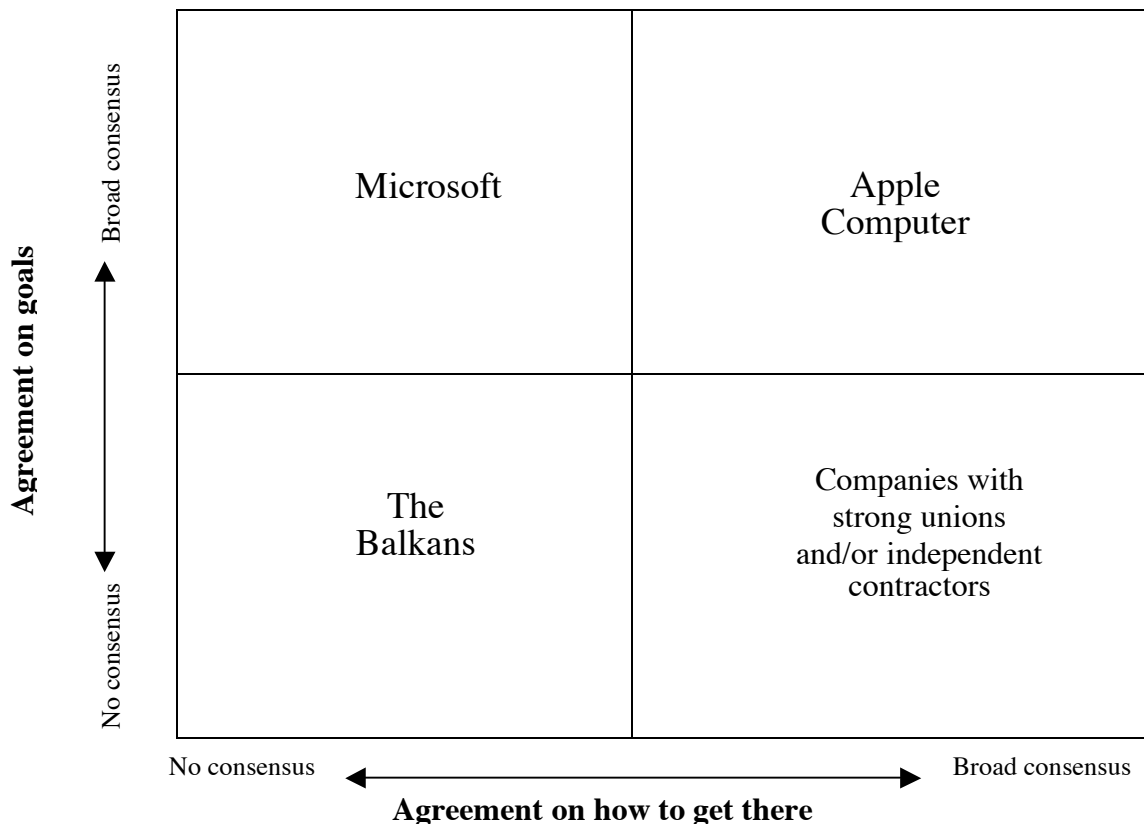
Clayton Christensen, Matt Marx, and Howard Stevenson (*ibid.*)

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## 1. Which Tools Work Best to Change Schools?

“The primary task of management is to get people to work together in a systematic way,” say Harvard business professors Clayton Christensen, Matt Marx, and Howard Stevenson in this provocative *Harvard Business Review* article. “Like orchestra conductors, managers direct the talents and actions of various players to produce a desired result. It’s a complicated job, and it becomes much more so when managers are trying to get people to change...”

Leaders who want change, say Christensen, Marx, and Stevenson, must start by figuring out where their organization is on this matrix. The vertical axis is the level of agreement that employees have on their goals, and the horizontal axis is the level of agreement on how to reach those goals.

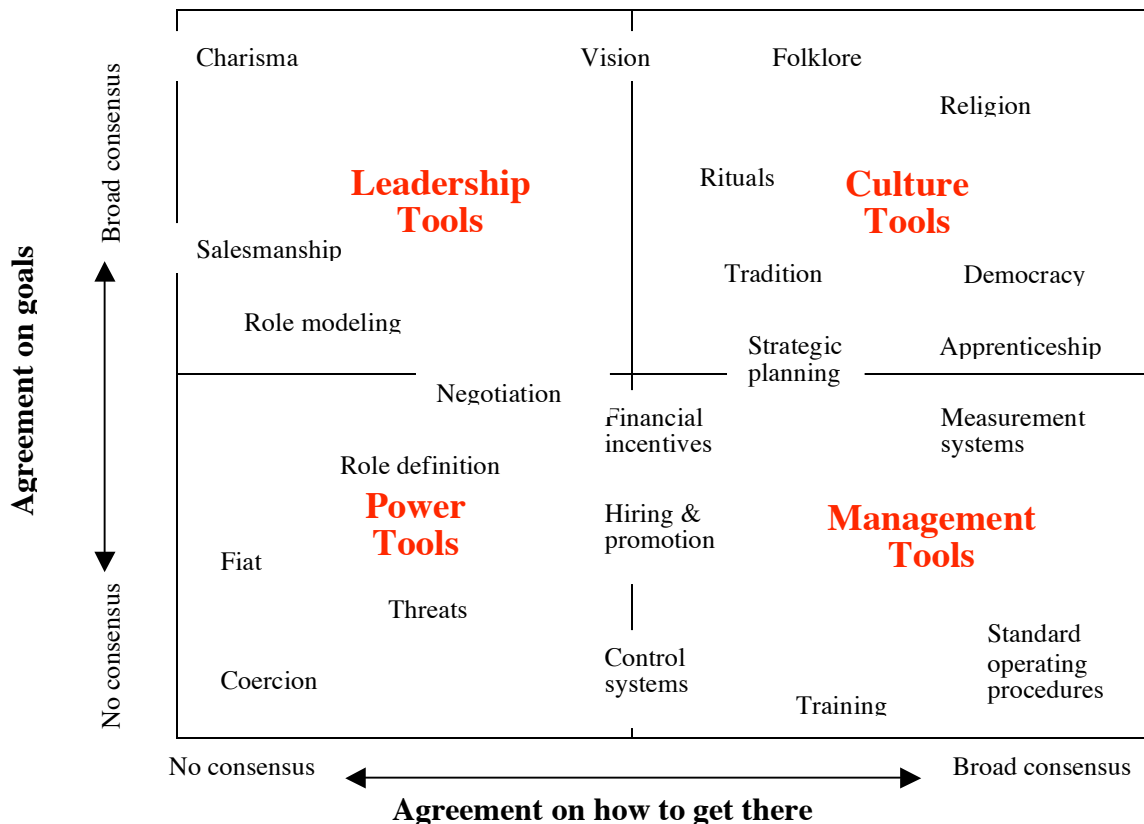


In the business world, Microsoft is in the top left quadrant: agreement on the mission (to dominate the desktop) but not on how to accomplish it. Apple Computer fits in the top right quadrant, with employees agreeing on the mission *and* how to get there (it’s been said that Apple put the *cult* in culture). Companies with strong union presence or a lot of independent

contractors are in the bottom right quadrant: little commitment to the mission but willing to follow prescribed procedures if they think those actions will produce needed results. And the Balkans are a historical example of the bottom left quadrant – warring nation-states with dissension on overall purpose and on how to proceed. Christensen, Marx, and Stevenson say that K-12 education is usually in the bottom left quadrant, with little consensus on mission *or* means.

The authors go on to say that, from the change leader’s point of view, there isn’t a “best” quadrant to be in. If you’re trying to change an organization, each quadrant poses unique challenges, as John Sculley, CEO of Apple Computer from 1983-1993, learned when he tried to redirect that company. The trick, say the authors, is using a management strategy suited to the quadrant your organization is in. “The tools that will induce employees in one quadrant to cooperate with a change program may well misfire with employees in a different quadrant,” they argue. “In fact, in any given situation, most tools for eliciting cooperation will not work... One of the rarest managerial skills is the ability to understand which tools will work in a given situation – and not to waste energy or risk credibility using tools that won’t.”

Christensen, Marx, and Stevenson then suggest the tools that are the most effective to change organizations within each quadrant.



- *Bottom left quadrant: Power tools* – “When members of an organization share little consensus on either dimension of agreement, the only tools that will elicit cooperation are ‘power tools’ such as fiat, force, coercion, and threats.” Marshal Tito, the dictator of Yugoslavia during the Cold War, used power tools to herd the disparate and antagonistic ethnic

groups of the Balkan Peninsula into a nation. He said, in effect, “I don’t care whether you agree with me or with one another about what you want out of life or about how to get it. What I want is for you to look down this gun barrel and cooperate.” This approach produced several decades of relative peace in the Balkans.

“This is not to suggest, of course, that managers bring firearms to the office,” write the authors. “But when organizational factions can’t agree on what they want or what to do, power tools are the only ones that work... The key is having the authority to use them... Just as a carpenter would never undertake a job without having the requisite tools in his or her toolbox, a wise manager in a low-consensus environment would not agree to lead a change program without the authority to wield the right power tools.”

Turning for a moment to the world of schools, they write, “Teachers, taxpayers, administrators, parents, students, and politicians have divergent priorities and disagree strongly about how to improve.” Many seemingly plausible approaches will not work in this environment, say the authors, including financial incentives and pay-for-performance schemes, which they argue have “failed miserably in producing enduring change in schools.”

- *Bottom right quadrant: Management tools* – Workers in this quadrant come to work for very different reasons than their managers, but they will cooperate if they believe that certain procedures will get them what they want. The management tools that will be most effective for driving change in this quadrant are training, standard operating procedures, and measurement systems.

- *Top left quadrant: Leadership tools* – When employees agree on the goal but not on the means, the most effective change strategies are charismatic leadership, salesmanship, vision statements, and role modeling. Bill Gates used these strategies in 1995 to energize Microsoft employees to respond to the Netscape threat to its desktop dominance and adjust to the rising World Wide Web.

But again, argue Christensen, Marx, and Stevenson, tools that work in one quadrant don’t work in another. “The same actions viewed as inspiring and visionary among employees in the upper-left corner of the matrix can be regarded with indifference or disdain in the lower quadrants,” write the authors. “Consider vision statements. When members of a group agree on what they want to achieve, statements that articulate where the organization needs to go can be energizing and inspiring. But if employees don’t agree about what they want, vision statements won’t help much in changing their behavior – aside from inducing a collective rolling of eyes.”

- *Top right quadrant: Culture tools* – Employees in this quadrant will cooperate almost automatically to maintain the status quo; they believe in it and think it’s working. This poses a real challenge for a manager who believes that change is needed. The authors argue that this is the most difficult quadrant for leaders who seek to bring about change; culture tools like rituals, traditions, and folklore could work, but only gradually over time.

When they first begin, most organizations are in the lower left quadrant, driven in fairly autocratic fashion by their founders’ vision and goals. If things go well, employees’ attitudes gradually move toward the top right quadrant (hiring and attrition reinforce this tendency), with more and more believing in the mission and the way they are achieving it. But if the

organization is not successful or has a setback, people regress to the Balkans quadrant, and it takes power tools to get them organized and energized again. In the corporate world, some turnaround leaders started in the lower left quadrant – Gordon Bethune at Continental Airlines, who once took a thick, overly bureaucratic instruction manual and burned it in the company parking lot, or Jack Welch, who was known as Neutron Jack in his early years at General Electric – and gradually changed into warmer culture builders.

“The Tools of Cooperation and Change” by Clayton Christensen, Matt Marx, and Howard Stevenson in *Harvard Business Review*, October 2006 (Vol. 84, #10, p. 72-80), no e-link available

## **2. Leadership Advice from a Symphony Orchestra Conductor**

The jobs of school principal and symphony orchestra conductor have a lot in common. In this interview in the *Harvard Business Review*, Boston Pops conductor Keith Lockhart makes these comments. Try substituting “principal” for “conductor” and “teachers” for “musicians” as you read:

“Most concert musicians had ‘the dream’... Few of them dreamed about being a person who takes orders. But in any organization if there are no people who are followers, you’ve got a situation.

“How does the conductor empower everybody while still creating a musical collaboration that works? The key in my experience is to make the musicians feel invested in your decisions – so that they own them, too. That’s not always easy. For example, if a bassoonist has a solo in the middle of a piece and you say, ‘Well, I really don’t like where that’s going’ – how do you get that musician to buy into your idea? ... It can be humiliating, and others can become defensive on their colleague’s behalf. So, even though you have formal authority as the conductor, if you haven’t built support from the ground up at the start, you’ll be in trouble.

“That [support] comes in part from being someone who can be absolutely trusted and relied upon. I’ve had air-raid sirens go off during concerts, blackouts, rainstorms postponing outdoor televised performances. In situations like that, people ask, ‘What does Keith want to do?’ And if I can take charge and come through for them in a crisis, that goes a long way.

“Even when things are going smoothly, every player is relying on you. A violinist may seem buried in the sheet music. But she knows exactly when she needs to look up for guidance. I’d better be there, as I used to tell my students in my conducting classes: If you sometimes think you’re peripheral, just make a mistake, because the moment you do, you’ll get 80 pairs of eyes glaring at you.

“People assume that when you become a conductor you’re into some sort of Napoleonic thing – that you want to stand on that big box and wield your power. I’m not a power junkie, I’m a responsibility junkie. If I were in it for the power, I don’t think I could get the orchestra to follow me anywhere.”

“Responsibility Junkie: Conductor Keith Lockhart on Tradition and Leadership” by Glenn Mangurian in *Harvard Business Review*, October 2006 (Vol. 84, #10, p. 30), no e-link

### **3. Successfully Facilitating Teacher Team Meetings**

In this article in *The Learning Principal*, Atlanta-based educator Cheryl Gray argues that principals often have to be skilled facilitators if teacher teams are to get results. She contrasts facilitation to the role of leader and manager, using lists from Weaver and Farrell (1997):

Leader:

- Concerned with doing the right thing
- Takes the long view
- Concentrates on what and why
- Thinks in terms of innovations, development, and the future
- Sets the vision: the tone and direction
- Hopes others will respond and follow
- Appeals to hopes and dreams
- Expects others to help realize a vision
- Inspires innovation

Manager:

- Concerned with doing things right
- Takes the short-term view
- Concentrates on how
- Thinks in terms of administration, maintenance, and the present
- Sets the plan, the pace
- Hopes others will complete their tasks
- Monitors boundaries and defines limits
- Expects others to fulfill their mission or purpose
- Inspires stability

Facilitator:

- Concerned with helping people do things
- Helps people find a view and articulate it
- Helps people concentrate and be clear on the here and now
- Helps people think and helps them communicate their thoughts
- Helps people make meaning of tone and direction, and to function well at the required pace
- Hopes others will engage in the process
- Helps others make meaning of hopes and dreams; pushes appropriately on boundaries
- Helps others articulate a shared vision and common mission and purpose
- Helps people respond to things that are new and things that remain the same

Gray has these specific suggestions for the ways a principal can be most helpful facilitating teacher teams:

• *Create a team “charter.”* Devote the team’s first meeting to defining its purpose, describing how the team will function, and deciding how it will evaluate itself.

• *Agree on meeting norms.* A humorous way to do this is to ask team members to spend a few minutes imagining or role-playing an *awful* meeting – and then spelling out norms that will prevent meetings like that from happening. Here are some sample norms:

- Meet only when there is a meaningful agenda.
- Start and end on time.
- Allow everyone to contribute an agenda item.
- Disseminate the agenda before the meeting.
- Have healthy refreshments.
- Silence all cell phones during meetings.
- Avoid checking for or sending text messages or e-mails during meetings.
- Avoid personal grooming (brushing hair, applying makeup, cleaning fingernails) during meetings.
- Have a different facilitator and recorder for each meeting.
- Avoid interrupting others when they are speaking
- Differentiate between brainstorming and discussion.
- Listen respectfully to all ideas.
- Express disagreement with ideas, not individuals.
- Reach decisions by consensus.
- Express differing opinions within the meeting, not afterwards.
- Keep disagreements confidential.
- Conduct group business in front of the group.
- Conduct personal business outside the meeting.

• *Recognize diverse team member roles.* These include: contributors (task-oriented), collaborators (willing to pitch in), communicators (process-oriented), and challengers (questioning and encouraging risks) (Parker, 1990). Another list (DeBono, 1985) is:

- Information providing
- Optimism and positives
- Skepticism, why something may not work
- Feelings, hunches, and intuition
- Possibilities and new ideas
- Managing the thinking process

Gray also suggests the following group reflection skills that principals can use or suggest as teams process their meetings:

• *Observe and assess meetings.* Encourage one team member to give a brief report at the end on items such as participation by all members, staying on task, the ability to curb distracters or put them “on hold,” the overall climate, and other norms and items in the team’s charter.

• *Allow enough time to talk issues through and debrief.*

• *Pose questions that cater to introverted and extraverted personalities.* Three common reflection questions for individuals or the group are:

- What squares with my thinking?
- What's still rolling around in my mind?
- What do we need to change?

• *Don't avoid tough issues.* "If team members only focus the debriefing on the niceties," says Gray, "they are not engaged in hard work and do not have a trusting climate. If tough issues emerge, focus on the issue and not the persons involved. Paraphrase and ask clarifying questions to get to the essence of the concern. Encourage a balance of problem identifying and problem solving by putting the issue on the next meeting's agenda for resolution. Emphasize learning together, even through failures, mistakes, and miscommunication. Be an example – inside and outside the meeting – of listening, learning, and leading through conflict."

"Pulling Together: Principals Can Empower Teams of Teachers by Taking on the Role of Facilitator" by Cheryl Gray in *The Learning Principal*, October 2006 (Vol. 2, #2, p. 1, 6, 7), no e-link available

#### **4. Getting Enough Sleep**

In this alarming interview in the *Harvard Business Review*, Harvard Medical School professor Charles Czeisler shares some key research findings on sleep deprivation:

• When a person stays awake for 18 consecutive hours, the following functions begin to deteriorate: reaction speed, short-term and long-term memory, ability to focus, decision-making capacity, math processing, cognitive speed, and spatial orientation.

• When a person sleeps only five to six hours a night for several days in a row, the accumulated sleep deficit magnifies these negative effects.

• People who average four hours of sleep a night for 4-5 days have the same level of cognitive impairment as if they've been awake for 24 hours.

• This is the equivalent of being legally drunk. "The analogy to drunkenness is real," says Czeisler, "because, like a drunk, a person who is sleep deprived has no idea how functionally impaired he or she truly is."

• 1,350,000 U.S. automobile accidents were caused by driver fatigue since 2001, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

• Sleep deprivation can also exacerbate high blood pressure and obesity.

• Any organization whose culture admires working with insufficient sleep is putting its employees, its teams, and its mission in jeopardy.

Czeisler is not enthusiastic about sleeping pills, advising insomniacs to have a doctor check out the true causes of their sleep problems (perhaps it has something to do with drinking 10 cups of coffee a day?) and try non-pill approaches, including cognitive behavioral therapy. He is also dubious about pills (being tested by the military) to keep people awake for extended periods of time, saying they have not yet been thoroughly tested.

Asked if he himself gets enough sleep, Czeisler says, “Like everyone else, I try to, but I don’t always succeed.” When he doesn’t get enough sleep, what does he do? There is no known substitute for sleep, he says, but these strategies can help sustain performance temporarily until we can get a good night’s sleep:

- Drinking beverages with caffeine, “the most widely used wake-promoting therapeutic in the world” (coffee is the world’s second biggest-selling commodity after oil). But not too much!

- Taking naps – keeping them under 30 minutes reduces post-nap grogginess.

- Being in a novel or engaging situation helps keep you alert.

- Exercise, standing upright, and exposure to bright light – especially blue light.

“Photon for photon, looking up at the blue sky, for example, is more effective in both resetting our biological clock and enhancing our alertness than looking down at the green grass,” says Czeisler.

“Sleep Deficit: The Performance Killer: A Conversation with Harvard Medical School Professor Charles A. Czeisler” by Bronwyn Fryer in *Harvard Business Review*, October 2006 (Vol. 84, #10, p. 53-59), no e-link available

## **5. Boy Brains and Girl Brains: What Teachers Can Do**

In this *American School Board Journal* article, researcher/writer Michael Gurian says that there are important differences in the way boys’ and girls’ brains work in the classroom, giving girls the advantage in some areas (e.g., writing and behaving) and boys the advantage in others (spatial problems and abstract reasoning). But if teachers orchestrate learning with these differences in mind, argues Gurian, they can level the playing field. Some examples:

- If elementary teachers tell their students to jot notes in preparation for writing a story or essay, half of the boys in any classroom (and some girls) will stare at a blank page. But if teachers have students draw picture panels with colored pens during the brainstorming part of story or essay writing, boys will do as well as girls when they start writing because they can refer to a graphic/spatial tool.

- Many teachers constantly nag, threaten, and punish boys for fidgeting, touching other students, tapping their pencils, or “zoning out.” But those who understand that these behaviors are related to brain differences know better. “Teachers can learn how to organize classrooms so that any boys (and girls) who need it can physically move while they are learning and keep their brains engaged,” writes Gurian. “The rest state and boredom issues begin to dissolve. Discipline referrals decrease exponentially.”

- Girls are often frustrated and unsuccessful in math and science when lessons rely solely on abstract symbols on the blackboard. But girls do as well as boys when teachers present concepts with words, essay questions, and active group work.

- Cooperative learning activities in classrooms cater to girls’ learning and relational styles, but the popularity of cooperative learning leads some teachers to stop using competition – a dynamic that benefits many boys. According to Gurian, “When teachers receive training on how competitive learning can be integrated into classrooms (without chaos ensuing), they

actually come to enjoy seeing both boys and girls challenge one another to learn better. Many girls who avoided leadership before now step forward to lead.”

“Learning and Gender” by Michael Gurian in *American School Board Journal*, October 2006 (Vol. 193, #10, p. 18-22), no e-link available

## **6. Should High Schools Stop Offering Advanced Placement Courses?**

In last week’s *New York Times* education column, Joe Berger reported that Scarsdale High School, located in an affluent suburb of New York City, is thinking about eliminating Advanced Placement courses. Why? Because some teachers, especially in English, science, and history, feel AP courses pressure them to take a “march to the sea” approach to instruction, cramming in vast amounts of information and robbing them of the ability to improvise, be whimsical from time to time, and get their students wrestling with knotty problems. Scarsdale’s math teachers are less critical, saying the AP curriculum is appropriate, but the consensus at the school is that AP is contributing to a rat-race mentality that detracts from the value of a high-school education.

Scarsdale educators also wonder how much these courses really help students down the road, since the scores from AP tests taken by seniors don’t arrive in time to affect college admission, and many colleges don’t allow students to use AP credits to opt out of required courses. Is it the school’s mission to give some students a head start on college, AP critics ask, versus cultivating habits of mind like tolerance for ambiguity, persistence in the face of setbacks, and the ability to work with others on complex problems?

Some other high schools, including Fieldston in the Bronx, have eliminated AP courses without hurting their college admissions stats. But Scarsdale’s plan worries some parents. Would the elimination of AP lead to unfocused, parochial courses? “If my child learned about one Chinese dynasty and didn’t learn any European history, then that’s a problem,” said one parent. “I want to raise well-rounded children.”

Officials at the College Board, which publishes AP tests, say there is no need for the test to drive superficial cramming. Trevor Parker, director of the AP program, says students can get three-quarters of the multiple-choice questions wrong and still earn a 5 score if they do very well on rest of the test. Many questions are based on documents and demand analysis rather than memorization, he says. The problem is that most teachers don’t understand the way the test is scored and mistakenly overemphasize superficial coverage in their courses.

What should high schools do? Berger acknowledges that if schools that aren’t as well-known as Scarsdale dumped AP courses, they might have trouble convincing college admissions officials that their alternative courses are rigorous. He suggests a middle road: offer some AP courses for students who are ready and want to take electives as soon as they arrive in college – but don’t “bulk up” on AP courses just to impress college admissions officers.

“Demoting Advanced Placement” by Joe Berger in the *New York Times*, October 4, 2006, [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/04/education/04EDUCATION.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/04/education/04EDUCATION.html?_r=1&oref=slogin)

## 7. A Missing Ingredient in the High-School Curriculum

In this *Education Week* opinion piece, Will Fitzhugh, who publishes a journal of student writing called *The Concord Review*, argues that the main reason so many entering college students need remediation (and drop out) is that their high schools didn't require them to read non-fiction books and write serious term papers. "As long as the English department controls reading and writing in schools," he says, "the reading will be fiction, and the writing will be personal, creative, or the five-paragraph essay."

"Common sense," he continues, "buttressed by such work as that of E. D. Hirsch, Jr., would lead to the conclusion that perhaps one reason so many students need remedial work in college and don't return for sophomore year is that they have never read a nonfiction book, and thus have so little knowledge that they don't know what their professors are talking about."

Fitzhugh argues that in high schools there's something even more important than the quality of teaching: "The most important variable in student academic achievement is, in my view, student academic work... [Let's] turn more of our attention to assigning the kind of academic work that leads to the levels of achievement we wish for students."

"Bibliophobia" by Will Fitzhugh in *Education Week*, October 4, 2006 (Vol. 26, #6, p. 33), no free e-link available

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***Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?***

*If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: [kim.marshall8@verizon.net](mailto:kim.marshall8@verizon.net)*

# About the Marshall Memo

## ***Mission and focus:***

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 36 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through scores of 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 (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2004-05).

## ***Subscriptions:***

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for the school year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and information on paying by check or credit card.

## ***Website:***

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- Focus topics
- Headlines for all issues
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
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- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or password

## ***Publications covered***

*Those read this week are underlined.*

American Educator  
American School Board Journal  
ASCD SmartBrief  
Atlantic Monthly  
Boston Globe  
CommonWealth Magazine  
District Administration  
Ed. Magazine  
EDge  
Education Digest  
Education Gadfly  
Education Next  
Education Update  
Education Week  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Edutopia  
Elementary School Journal  
Harvard Business Review  
Harvard Education Letter  
Harvard Educational Review  
JESPAR  
Jimmy Kilpatrick  
Journal of Staff Development  
Language Learner  
Middle Ground  
Middle School Journal  
NASSP Bulletin  
New York Times  
New Yorker  
Newsweek  
PEN Weekly NewsBlast  
Phi Delta Kappan  
Principal  
Principal Leadership  
Principal's Research Review  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Reading Today  
Rethinking Schools  
Review of Educational Research  
Teacher Magazine  
Teachers College Record  
Theory Into Practice  
Times Educational Supplement