

# Marshall Memo 28

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education  
March 8, 2004

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## Quotes of the Week

“The ability to seize the initiative is the most essential quality of any truly successful manager.”

Sumanta Ghoshal and Heike Bruch in *Harvard Business Review* (see item #1)

“Almost everyone complains about not having enough time to deal with all the demands on them, but, in reality, a highly fragmented day is also a very lazy day. It can seem easier to fight fires than to set priorities and stick to them. The truth is that managers who carefully set boundaries and priorities achieve far more than busy ones do.”

Sumanta Ghoshal and Heike Bruch, *ibid.*

“I believe that teachers are our most important asset, and I make it a priority to support teachers. However, when a teacher isn’t able to provide effective instruction, then I have to put on another hat and deal with it.”

Guadalupe Guerrero, Boston principal (see item #4)

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## 1. Excuses, Excuses. Seize the Day!

This *Harvard Business Review* article, aimed at corporate executives, has striking relevance to the world of school principals. The authors (management professors in England and Switzerland) say that most managers blame insufficient time, shrinking resources, and lack of opportunity for their failure to be more successful. Excuses! say Ghoshal and Bruch. “What gets in the way of managers’ success is something much more personal – a deep uncertainty about acting according to their own best judgment... Such managers remain trapped in inefficiency because they simply assume that they do not have enough personal discretion or control. The ability to seize the initiative is the most essential quality of any truly successful manager.”

The key is seeing that you have more power than you think you do – realizing that demands you accept as givens are actually discretionary. “Most managers complain about having too little freedom in their jobs, while their bosses complain about managers’ failure to grasp opportunities. The truly effective managers we’ve observed are purposeful, trust in their own judgment, and adopt long-term, big-picture views to fulfill personal goals that tally with those of the organization as a whole. They break out of their perceived boxes, take control of their jobs, and become more productive...” The authors feel that this process plays out in three arenas:

- *Managing demands* – “Almost everyone complains about not having enough time to deal with all the demands on them, but, in reality, a highly fragmented day is also a very lazy day. It can seem easier to fight fires than to set priorities and stick to them. The truth is that managers who carefully set boundaries and priorities achieve far more than busy ones do.” Salvation comes from overcoming the desire to be indispensable. “Because their work is interactive and interdependent, most managers thrive on their sense of importance to others... At first managers – particularly novices – seem to thrive on all this clamoring for their time; the busier they are, the more valuable they feel. Inevitably, however, things start to slip. Eventually, many managers simply burn out and fail, not only because they find little time to pursue their own agendas but also because, in trying to please everyone, they typically end up pleasing no one.”

The authors use a case study of a young manager in an international consulting firm who complained, “I never said no to people in case they thought I couldn’t cope... I did what I thought was expected – regardless of what I was good at, what was important, or what I could physically do.” This woman’s career turned around

when she focused on her true long-range objective, developed a clear mental picture of that goal, and started planning in terms of one- to five-year time spans. With this mind-set, she realized that trying to be available to everyone who wanted to see her made her *inaccessible* to those she really needed to see. She took control of her calendar back from her personal assistant (who had been scheduling appointments with anyone who wanted to see her) and began scheduling meetings only with those who she really needed to see, fending off the others, and focused on the things she was really good at. She came to grips with the irony of effective management: “To quickly achieve the goals that mattered, she had to slow down and take control. To her surprise, the people who reported to her, as well as her supervisors and clients, responded well to her saying no.”

- *Developing resources* – Many managers complain about not having enough people, money, and equipment, as well being hamstrung by rules and regulations. The authors use the case study of a manager at Lufthansa, the international airline, whose bosses were insisting on 4% cost reductions every year for five years. Despite the climate of retrenchment, this man developed an imaginary blueprint of a professional development academy within the company, thinking of it as a temple that would have to be built brick by brick and pillar by pillar. This mental image helped him separate the “must-haves” from the “nice-to-haves” and the “can-live-withouts.” Keeping his long-range vision to himself (it would have freaked out his cost-cutting bosses), he methodically went about building his temple. First, he cleaned up the dysfunctional, incompetent practices in his department that were getting in the way of laying the foundation. Over a period of years, he put the foundation in place, then one pillar after another, and eventually persuaded his superiors to support the whole plan.

- *Exploiting alternatives* – Managers often fall into the trap of not exploring choices. “[T]hey either do not recognize that they have choices or do not take advantage of those they know they have. Because managers ignore their freedom to act, they surrender their options... Purposeful managers, by contrast, ... develop the ability to see, grasp, and fight for opportunities as they arise.” The authors tell the story of a manager in ConocoPhillips in Sweden who had in-depth knowledge of one area of the company’s operation, anticipated obstacles, developed a Plan B in case things went badly, and when things did go badly, sold his bosses on Plan B, to their great delight (and profit).

What this all comes down to a “bias for action.” The authors contend that action-orientation is not a special gift that only a few managers possess. It can be developed! Managers need to “seize the opportunity to extend the scope of their jobs, expand their choices, and pursue ambitious goals... Once managers command their agendas and sense their own freedom of choice, they come to relish their roles... Above all, effective managers with a bias for action aren’t managed by their jobs; rather, the reverse is true.”

“Reclaim Your Job” by Sumanta Ghoshal and Heike Bruch in *Harvard Business Review*, March 2004 (Vol. 82, #3, p. 41-45)  
<http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/b02/en/hbr/hbrsa/current/0403/article/R0403B.jhtml;jsessionid=FKJYMDMPRC4GMCTEQENSELQ>

## 2. Beyond the Flowery Mission Statement

In this article, a Harvard Business School professor criticizes well-meaning nonprofits for adopting lofty, wonderful-sounding mission statements and then taking on a bunch of *programs* without making deliberate decisions about which programs to run, which to drop, and which to say no to. “What most nonprofits call ‘strategy’, he writes, “is really just an intensive exercise in resource allocation and program management.” Acting without a clear long-term strategy can stretch an organization’s core capabilities and push it in unintended directions. [Does this sound familiar to world of education?] When the mission has been truly integrated into the strategic game plan, managers should be able to answer the following questions:

- How effective are our programs?
- How efficiently are they executed?
- Which programs should we drop?
- Which should we seek to add?

To get to this point, nonprofits need to go beyond the mission statement. The total package has four distinct components, all of which drive the organization:

- *Mission statement* – The purpose of this statement is to inspire and gather support, and it should be broad, far-reaching, and visionary and not change much over time. For example, the mission statement of Habit for Humanity is “to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the face of the earth [and] put the subject of inadequate housing in the hearts and minds of people.” [A similarly far-reaching mission statement for an urban middle school might be to prepare all students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college.]

- *Operational mission* – This brings the lofty, inspirational mission into the realm of quantifiable goals and allows the organization to trace its impact. An organization’s work should always be measurable. The operational mission answers provocative questions like these: What are we going to do about this problem? What is our unique role? The answers should specify the form of engagement through which the organization will have the most impact in the foreseeable future, given its expected resource and capabilities. While the mission statement is sacrosanct, the operational mission shifts as conditions change and the organization learns more about the environment in which it is operating and how its performance is going. [A school’s operational mission might be to have all students score at the Proficient or Advanced level on challenging state assessments.]

- *Strategy platform* – This is how the organization will achieve the operational mission – which programs to run and how to run them. In the nonprofit world, the platform has four components: (a) client and market development [for a school, this would include outreach to students and their families]; (b) program and service development and delivery [for a school, this means staffing and scheduling for the most efficient and effective delivery of services]; (c) funding and donor development [for a school, this means reaching out beyond standard funding]; and (d) organization development and governance [for a school, this includes how teachers, parents, and external partners are included in decision-making]. The strategy platform should relate to the operational mission and of course serve the basic mission of the organization.

- *Choice of programs* – Once the platform is in place, managers can make the day-to-day decisions of choosing which programs to run and which should be eliminated. When a new program appears on the radar, the first question to ask is, How does the program help accomplish the mission? [A school would decide on the literacy, math, behavior management, and other core programs necessary to accomplish the mission.]

The bottom line: the organization should “vigorously pursue those programs that support the logic of the entire strategy.” This will greatly improve its focus and its effectiveness at fulfilling its mission.

“Lofty Missions, Down-to-Earth Plans” by Kasturi Rangan in *Harvard Business Review*, March 2004 (Vol. 82, #3, p. 112-119)

<http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/b02/en/hbr/hbrsa/current/0403/article/R0403J.html;jsessionid=FKJYMDMPRC4GMCTEQENSELO>

### 3. An Outlet for Enterprising High-School Historians

For the last 17 years, *The Concord Review* has published four issues a year with the best history research papers submitted by high-school students from across the country. The papers are often more than 5,000 words long, and topics have included:

- Did Chaim Rumkowski, the Jewish leader of Poland's Lodz ghetto, do more good or harm by cooperating with the Nazis?
- To what extent were John Maynard Keynes's economic ideas truly revolutionary, and to what extent were they borrowed from others?
- Why did Anne Hutchinson suffer so much more at the hands of the Puritans than her brother-in-law, the Rev. John Wheelwright, when both attacked the leadership?
- Was Abigail Adams really a feminist, or is that a construction of modern feminists?
- The history of the Ferris wheel and the man who invented it (who died brokenhearted).
- The emancipation proclamation that John Fremont, a Union Army commander, issued in Missouri in 1861, two years before Abraham Lincoln's took effect.

For these and other student authors, having their papers published in the *Concord Review* represented a greater level of research and depth than they had experienced in high school, and writing the paper was a transformational experience. Naturally, many submitted them with their college applications, and a substantial number were accepted in top-flight colleges.

Will Fitzhugh, the founder, editor, and publisher of *Concord Review*, bemoans the fact that many high-school students graduate without reading a nonfiction book from cover to cover, that most teachers seem to have stopped assigning research papers, and that state assessments rarely ask students to write more than a standard five-paragraph essay. Even the National Endowment for the Humanities history essay contest limits students to 1,000 words. Fitzhugh is looking for 5,000 words or more, and offers four \$3,000 prizes each year for the best *Concord Review* papers.

"A Touchstone for the High School Essay" by Michael Winerip in *The New York Times*, March 3, 2004 <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/03/education/03education.html>

### 4. Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners

In a sidebar in this article, Maricel Santos of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy in Cambridge, Massachusetts, includes this self-

assessment for principals who want to improve the achievement of English Language Learners in their school:

- How much do I know about the English-language learners in my school?

How many ELL students are there? What are their countries of origin?

- Do I know where I can find out more about the cultural backgrounds of these students? What resources exist in my community?

- What steps am I taking to promote my own professional development in the education of ELL students?

- What steps have I taken to support the language and literacy development of my ELL students?

- How do I serve as an advocate for high-quality instruction in all subject areas for the ELL students in my school?

- What supports exist in my school to help ensure that it is a comfortable and welcoming place for ELL students?

- What is my definition of “multiculturalism”? What do I think of when I imagine a “multicultural school”?

- In what specific ways do I model the fair treatment of students and staff from a variety of backgrounds?

“Raising the Achievement of English Language Learners” by Maricel Santos, *Harvard Education Letter*, March / April 2004, Vol. 20, #2, p. 6-8), no e-link available.

## **5. Academic Risks for Gay and Lesbian Students**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students face widespread harassment in American middle and high schools, and the hostile climate seems to produce lower academic achievement among many of these students. A 2003 survey in 48 states conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) found:

- 84 percent of those polled said they were verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation.
- More than 90 percent said they frequently heard anti-LGBT remarks such as “faggot,” “dyke,” and “that’s so gay!” in school.
- 39 percent of the total sample reported physical harassment (being pushed or shoved) at school.
- 55 percent of transgender student reported physical harassment.
- Students who experienced harassment had GPA’s that were on average more than 10 percent lower than those who did not (2.9 versus 3.3).

- Harassed students were twice as likely not to plan to attend college.
- 83 percent said their teachers never intervened, or did so “only some of the time,” when they heard homophobic comments.
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students who felt there were supportive teachers or staff in their schools had higher college aspirations and higher GPA’s.

“So it’s not just schoolyard bullying, kids being kids,” said Joe Kosciw, research analyst for GLSEN. “[These students] report doing more poorly in classes and feel like they don’t want to continue their educations. That has real-life implications for them, not just in school but for their future.”

“Anti-Gay Harassment Linked to Academic Risks” by Michael Sadowski in *Harvard Education Letter*, March/April 2004 (Vol. 20, #2, p. 5). The GLSEN study is available online at: <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/news/record/1413.html>

## 6. Math Curriculum Flap in New York City

This school year, the New York City public schools implemented the Everyday Math curriculum in almost all elementary schools. The citywide adoption (only a few high-achieving schools are exempt) has stirred up considerable resistance. Some vocal parents are attacking Everyday Math for being “fuzzy” and progressive, not spending enough time on computational skills, and introducing advanced concepts too slowly.

Developed by a team of experts at the University of Chicago, Everyday Math uses curriculum ideas from Japan and the Soviet Union, linking math more directly to everyday life. The curriculum spirals through challenging problem-solving content, constantly asks students to explain their thinking, and embeds computation in a series of math games. The curriculum is used in 28,000 schools nationwide and has a solid track record of boosting student achievement on standardized tests.

Why the resistance in New York? Andy Isaacs of the University of Chicago’s Center for Elementary Mathematics and Science Education, thinks that many Americans don’t realized how badly traditional math education has failed them. “People will say, ‘I could never do math,’” he says. “How many people would say, ‘Oh, I could never read’? It’s not socially acceptable to be bad at reading, but it *is* socially acceptable to be bad at math.”

Another reason appears to be New York’s crash citywide implementation with very little training, even for math coaches responsible for supporting teachers in their classrooms. New York schools that are having a smoother adoption had been using

the curriculum for several years and were able to phase it in gradually. Some cynical New York educators take the view that “this too shall pass” and believe that each new wave of curriculum is designed to generate dollars for another round of professional development and research. One angry parent declared, “There’ll be enough pressure brought. And eventually [the curriculum] will be gone, along with the mayor.”

Deputy Chancellor Diana Lam staunchly defends Everyday Math, declaring that “our teachers can do this really hard work with the appropriate support system” and that “students, whether they are poor, whether they are minority, are also able to do this kind of high-powered work.”

“Lost in Translation” by Samantha Stainburn in *Teacher Magazine*, March/April 2004 (Vol. XV, #4, p. 27-31)  
<http://www.teachermagazine.org/tmstory.cfm?slug=05Translation.h15>

## **7. Stellar Results in Boston**

The lead editorial in last week’s *Bay State Banner* featured Boston’s Roxbury Preparatory Charter School, touting the school’s impressive scores on the 2003 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests. Roxbury Prep has 180 students in grades 6-8, all of them African-American or Latino and 56 percent qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. The school operates on the assumption that only Level 3 and 4 on the MCAS (Proficient and Advanced) are acceptable levels of student performance. Here are some of the 2003 results:

- 58 percent of eighth graders scored Proficient and Advanced in Science (compared to 53 percent at Boston Latin, a selective exam school, and 49 percent in suburban Brookline, Harvard, and Marblehead).
- 58 percent of Roxbury Prep students scored Proficient or Advanced on the eighth-grade Math test.
- 82 percent of seventh graders scored Proficient or Advanced on the English Language Arts MCAS test.
- 76 percent of sixth graders scored Proficient and Advanced in Math, outscoring all other Boston schools and also suburban Newton (72 percent), Weston (66 percent), and Concord (64 percent).
- The school adds value: 27 percent of Roxbury Prep students failed the Math MCAS (scoring at Level 1) as fourth graders in their former elementary schools; none of these same students failed as sixth graders, and 81 percent scored Proficient and Advanced.

The editorial praises co-directors John King and Josh Phillips for their rigorous, highly effective program. The editorial concludes, "It must be noted that Roxbury Prep was able to turn failure to proficiency in only two years. This indicates that the rate of academic improvement in the city's public schools can be accelerated. With proficiency as a standard and the support of the community, it is possible to transform the Boston schools into a system that produces academic stars."

"A Model for Success" in *The Bay State Banner*, March 4, 2004, p. 4

## 8. Short Items:

- *New Fred Jones classroom discipline segment* – The March update of the *Education World* website has a new chapter from Fred Jones's material, this time on creative meaningful motivation for students to behave and excel.

"Adding Motivation to Mastery" by Fred Jones in the *Education World* Website  
[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/jones/jones007.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/jones/jones007.shtml)

- *High-school and college dropout statistics* – In a quasi-editorial at the front of the current issue of *Teacher Magazine*, Ronald Wolk lays out the trajectory of a cohort of American ninth graders as they move through high school and college, calling it a "moral issue" and a "tragic waste of human potential":

- 100 students enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade;
- 67 of them graduate from high school;
- 38 of them enter college;
- 26 of them are still in college after sophomore year;
- 18 of them graduate with an associate or bachelor's degree within six years.

"Double or Nothing" by Ronald Wolk in *Teacher Magazine*, March/April 2004 (Vol. XV, #5, p.4) <http://www.teachermagazine.org/tmstory.cfm?slug=05Persp.h15>

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*Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?*

*If you have comments or suggestions, or if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should be covered, please e-mail: [kim.marshall8@verizon.net](mailto:kim.marshall8@verizon.net)*

# About the Marshall Memo

## *Mission and focus:*

This weekly memo aims to keep busy principals, teachers, and other educators very well-informed on important research, ideas, and developments in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, a former Boston teacher and administrator, is your “designated reader,” searching through a wide range of publications the week they come out, zeroing in on the articles that are most relevant and useful to improving teaching and learning at the school level, and summarizing them in a brief e-mail. Target topics include the following:

- *School leadership* – Building a professional learning community; effective teamwork; effective schools practices; supervision and evaluation of teachers; time management.
- *Effective teaching* – Key variables associated with high student achievement; professional development of teachers; teacher leadership and career ladders; multiple intelligences and brain research.
- *Curriculum* – Alignment and planning with the end in sight; teaching for understanding; new ideas in reading, writing, and math.
- *Assessment* – Aligned formative and summative assessments; using data and student work for continuous improvement; graphic display of student achievement data; standardized testing and the debate on standards.
- *Closing the gap* – Effective strategies to close the racial/ economic achievement gap; the innate-ability / intelligence / effective effort debate; safety-net programs.
- *Positive school culture* – Student discipline; social-emotional learning; moral development; parent involvement; and community partnerships.
- *And...* – New areas of research; upcoming television and radio programs on education.

## *Publications covered:*

(those read this week are underlined)

American Education Research Journal  
American Educator  
American School Board Journal  
ASCD SmartBrief  
Atlantic Monthly  
Bay State Banner  
Boston Globe  
Commonwealth Magazine  
Curriculum/ Education Update (ASCD)  
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)  
Education Digest  
Education Gadfly  
Education Next  
Education Week  
Educational Leadership  
Educational Researcher  
Elementary School Journal  
Harpers  
Harvard Business Review  
Harvard Education Letter  
Harvard Education Review  
Middle School Journal  
New York Times  
New Yorker  
PEN Weekly NewsBlast  
Phi Delta Kappan  
Principal Magazine  
Psychology Today  
Reading Research Quarterly  
Reading Today  
Review of Educational Research  
Teachers College Record  
Teacher Magazine

If one of the summaries is of particular interest, subscribers are encouraged to read the full article. E-links will be provided whenever possible. If you would like to suggest additional publications, please be in touch.

## *Subscriptions:*

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