

Putting Criticism of Higher Ed into Perspective

Our Universities: How Bad? How Good, by Peter Brooks

Since the fates of independent College Prep schools are tied inevitably to the fate of Higher Education, it is good, from time to time, to review the current critique of Higher Ed. In this review of four newer books, Brooks, a Yale professor, takes all but one to task for facile reasoning that contributes to what he would claim is the faddish bashing of professors, lazy students, and materialistic competition. Reading this review, one hears the not so subtle echoes of criticism of secondary education in the call to measure outcomes (no college child left behind?), the abolition of tenure, the rueful regrets about falling behind other countries. The "barbell effect," however, representative of the huge inequities at large in the land, is a dilemma the author agrees is serious, a dilemma with which we also struggle in our schools; even the state universities are overpriced for many students. While agreeing that many problems beleaguer higher education - Brooks is no apologist - he also reminds us that professors more than ever are aware of the need to teach well and that the demographic changes in Higher Education reflect much more fairly the demographics of this country.

Peter Herzberg, The Brearley School, NY

New York Review of Books, March 2011

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PETER HERZBERG
Coordinating Editor, Associate Head of the Brearley School, New York, NY

PEARL ROCK KANE
Klingenstein Center Director, New York, NY

CHRIS LAURICELLA
Head of the Park School of Buffalo, NY

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Assistant Head, Albuquerque Academy, Albuquerque, NM

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ADELE TONGE
Communications Manager, Klingenstein Center, New York, NY

STEPHEN J. VALENTINE
Assistant Head, Upper School
Montclair Kimberley Academy, Montclair, NJ

ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



Will School schedules ever fit the Circadian Rhythms of Adolescence?

School Start Times and the Sleep-Wake Cycle of Adolescents: A Review and Critical Evaluation of Available Evidence, by Matthew Kirby, Stefania Maggi, and Amedeo D'Angiulli

There is sufficient evidence that delaying school start time can affect academic performance of adolescents. This five-page synthesis of research on adolescence and sleep patterns describes the physiological changes that occur during puberty. There is a natural preference for adolescents to go to sleep later and to wake up later in the day. Adolescents, whose circadian rhythms are unique, show greater evening preference and a greater requirement for sleep than children and adults. Research indicates that cumulative sleep loss causes inability to concentrate, memory lapses, difficulty in accomplishing tasks that require a complex sequence of actions and a decrease in creativity. Simply telling adolescents to go to bed earlier will not necessarily help them deal with morning sleepiness. One solution is to delay school start times. The Minneapolis public schools have done this (as has St. George's in Newport, RI.) The social and financial ramifications of this change are described and include faculty scheduling, family arrangements, transportation and reviewing athletic schedules. Full article requires subscription.

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

Education Researcher, vol 40 No 2 March 2011



A Gentle Reminder of the Impact of Caring Teachers

What I Learned at School, by Marie Myung-Ok Lee

Amidst the cacophony of legislative budgetary assaults on the teaching profession, a recent Op-Ed piece in the *New York Times* by Brown University Professor Marie Myung-Ok Lee is a gentle reminder of the difference caring teachers can make in the lives of their students. As the national co-director of a teacher recruitment project through the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation from 1987-1998, it was heartening to hear how many young people were encouraged to become teachers by teachers like Margaret Leibfried, whom Ms. Lee profiles in *What I Learned at School*. During those years "A Celebration of Teaching" collaborated with many individuals and organizations, including the Klingenstein Center, to invite great teachers to play a role in securing the future of the teaching profession by saying to a talented student, "I think you would be a great teacher." Ms. Lee entered the teaching profession because of her teacher's love of literature and compassion for her as a shy young woman. A victim of a budget cut, Ms. Leibfried never taught again. What will be the costs to our society as the budgetary ax falls on many caring teachers whose impact on the lives of students is immeasurable in so many ways? Are the union rules of last to be hired, first to be fired eliminating many outstanding teachers?

Peter Schmidt, Gill St. Bernard's School, NJ

New York Times Op-Ed, 3/31/11



Can Web-Based Homework Lessen The Time it Takes for Students to Achieve Competency and Increase Performance?

Study: A Comparison of Traditional Homework to Computer-Supported Homework, by Michael Mendicino; Leena Razzaq, and Neil Heffernan

Clayton Christensen's *Disrupting Class* explored groundbreaking theories surrounding technology's power and its ability to significantly alter the way we do school in the future. Now, initial research is showing that online homework, especially in mathematics, creates more effective practice time than traditional pen to paper work. We know that students learn best when feedback is specific and timely. Online homework options allow for instant grading and correction of student errors. Students are able to learn while doing and are prompted to alter course at the onset of a misconception. This study, which focuses solely on mathematics with younger students, cites the advantages of web-assisted homework and shows conclusively that students learn more through online work. Web-assisted homework additionally provides educators with immediate access to student data and allows teachers to "pinpoint" points of incongruity and readiness for further challenge. An added benefit may include reducing the burden of grading homework and of distributing graded homework in a timely and meaningful fashion.

Ruth Ann Waldo, Westminster School, OK

Ed.M. Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

Journal of Research in Teaching and Education



An RX for Education?

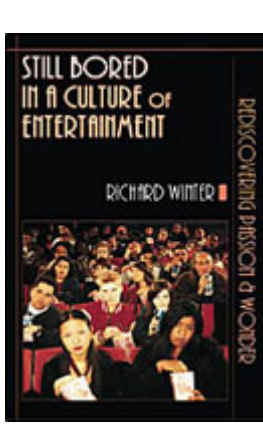
Adjusting the Prescription: The School of Medicine overhauls its century-old educational approach, by Maura Singleton

What can K-12 educators learn from the University of Virginia's newly designed School of Medicine? A fair amount, in fact. The medical students in the Class of 2014 are undergoing a learning experience that is radically different from that of previous generations. Instead of sitting in large lecture halls, these students take classes in the "learning studio," a 4,500-square-foot circular room with large tables that aim to promote deep conversation and authentic collaboration. The curriculum, bolstered by case studies, synthesizes the various disciplines by combining basic science classes with clinical issues. One such class is called "Tolerance and Immunization." The School's Simulation Center provides hands-on learning opportunities with a premium placed on the debriefing process and personalizing learning for students. This overhaul of curriculum and pedagogy did not come without "some uncomfortable truths" according to Singleton. How can the shifts occurring at UVA's School of Medicine serve as one more catalyst for conversation and action in K-12 institutions?

Megan Howard, Trinity School, GA

The University of Virginia Magazine, Spring 2011

BOOKS



Craving Variety in a Wilderness of Mirrors

Still Bored in a Culture of Entertainment: Rediscovering Passion and Wonder, by Richard Winter

In this book, Dr. Richard Winter offers a prescription to aid those who find themselves ailing from boredom, even while living among the multiplicity of entertainment options we produce and ingest today. Identifying the causes of boredom, Winter also explains how the lack of stimulation, repetition, and a feeling of being disconnected augment boredom. He reflects succinctly the reality with which many American students wrestle and against which teachers often compete for their attention. Given the increase of both leisure time and the technological dependency as well as overstimulation resulting from increased exposure to the entertainment and advertising, it is no wonder, Winter suggests, that the numbing electronic cocktail contributes to a sense of entitlement we often see in our pupils. A tenured seminary professor, whose Christian perspective is less overt in the book than one might expect, given the fact that the publisher is an evangelical press, Winter explores how an emphasis on subjective experience or following inner desires encourages little priority to create a hierarchy for action. Strategies for offsetting boredom bring resolve to the reader who may emerge vexed by finding a solution.

Clay Smythe, Memphis University School, TN

Ed.M. Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

Intervarsity Press, 2002



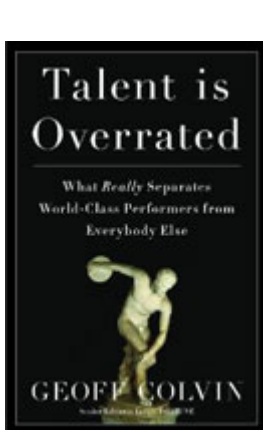
Five Factors of Personality

Quirk: Brain Science Makes Sense of Your Peculiar Personality, by Hannah Holmes

Quirk is the latest in a seemingly unending stream of books about neuroscience written for a popular audience. Using the structure of five-factor personality analysis (openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism), author Hannah Holmes visits mice research labs to, as her subtitle tells us, "make sense of your peculiar personality." Holmes, whose decidedly down to earth work encourages science literacy by bringing science writing into the blog age, argues that even those personality types that appear maladaptive in our current culture have survived evolutionary pressures for good reasons. One may wish to tread carefully before one draws the same conclusion about staffing independent schools. Evolution by natural selection is one thing, but the exigencies of building a learning community are quite another. Nonetheless, the five-factor model of personality is a useful lens through which to consider personnel issues.

Terence Gilheany, St. Andrew's School, DE

Random House, 2011



Taking Gladwell and Coyle Further

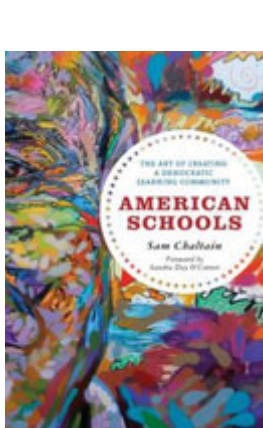
Talent is Overrated: What Really Separates World-Class Performers from Everybody Else, by Geoff Colvin

What makes Colvin's book such a standout read is not so much its thesis that outstanding performance has far more to do with practice and effort than most of us have ever realized. After all, this is a thesis equally shared by Malcolm Gladwell in *Outliers* and Daniel Coyle in *The Talent Code*. What makes Colvin's book so useful is its pragmatism. Colvin delves into the science of deliberate practice, for it is not any sort of practice that separates extraordinary achievers from the rest of us, but practice of a particular kind. From an analysis of Hall of Fame football receiver, Jerry Rice, to Warren Buffet, to Ben Franklin, Colvin presents a framework for how to train excellence that is an enticing for every independent school educator. The simple, incisive depth of the analysis belies the more complex and quite original implications for how we approach our craft.

A synopsis of book themes appears in [Fortune Magazine](#).

Ted Fish, Gardner Carney Leadership Institute (GCLI)

Penguin Group USA, 2010



Restoring a Sense of Shared Enterprise in Schools

American Schools, The Art of Creating A Democratic Learning Community, by Sam Chaltain

All too often school leaders propose curricular changes that seem to fall upon deaf ears. Months or sometimes years later, educators revisit the same ideas as their own and implement the exact desired changes without recalling such suggestions were ever made in the past. In Sam Chaltain's book, *American Schools*, he explores both the philosophy and practicality of successful leadership. One of the book's more powerful claims reminds school leaders that "people support only what they create." Chaltain challenges school leaders to design environments purposefully where teachers are charged to work collaboratively to create and re-create, to innovate and to practice "urgent patience." Chaltain offers practical ways to support democratic learning environments among teachers, by suggesting the use of Critical Friend Group (NSRF) protocols, sharing true case studies and detailed tracking systems to help implement change. Chaltain's suggestions are at once practical and inspiring, particularly for leaders who want to determine what next steps would be beneficial for improving morale and strengthening teamwork in schools.

Ruth Ann Waldo, Westminster School, OK

Ed.M. Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

Rowman & Littlefield, 2010

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The Klingenstein Center
for Independent School Leadership
Teachers College, Columbia University
Box 125
525 West 120th Street
New York, New York 10027
212-678-3156
<http://www.klingenstein.org/>

