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OF NOTE

Making Good on our Claims About the Power of Failure

Teaching to Fail, by Edward Burger

In this practical and lively article, Edward Burger, a professor of mathematics at Williams College, articulates his own journey as an educator as he sought to make good on his belief that risk taking and learning from errors are the foundations of real learning. In three different college settings, Burger told his students that 5% of their final grade would assess the "quality of their failure" in classroom discussion as well as in their written work. Not only has Burger witnessed a change in the atmosphere of his seminars—students now praise one another as they take authentic risks and hit dead ends—but he has also seen improvement in the quality of their thinking across the board. Many educators sense the profound implications of Carol Dweck's research on mindsets, but are not always clear about application. Burger describes the actual prompts and methods he uses with students, providing teachers with an entrée for implementing these strategies in their own classrooms. Reading this article makes one optimistic about cultivating a growth "mindset" in students individually. The article left this reader inspired to be as intrepid and thoughtful as its author.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM

Inside Higher Ed website, August 2012

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ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



Paying Attention to Time Spent Gaming

Video Game Playing, Attention Problems, and Impulsiveness: Evidence of Bidirectional Causality by Douglas A. Gentile, Edward L. Swing, Choon Guan Lim and Angeline Khoo

Most research on attention deficit problems in children and adolescents has focused on biological and genetic factors. The result: drug therapies and limited attention to research on how impulsivity and attention problems might be modified by the environment. This longitudinal study of a large sample (3,034) of children and adolescents aged 4-17 in 12 schools in Singapore focused on the environmental factors of video, specifically the content of video games and time spent playing. The study relied on self-reported questionnaire measures that asked students to report on the number of hours they played video games during each of three time periods (morning, afternoon and evening) on a typical school day and on a typical weekend. The questionnaire was administered in their classrooms. The findings, that children with greater impulsiveness and attention problems spend more time than their more attentive peers playing video games, was no surprise to educators. However, of particular interest to educators and parents is the finding that total time spent playing video games was a more robust predictor of attention problems and impulsive behavior than the content of video games.

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

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Inspiring Chapters in a Year-Long Journey

A Year at Mission Hill: A Study in What Makes a School Great, by Tom and Amy Valens

"All of us know what it feels like to go to school. Some of us know what it feels like to go to a great school. But almost none of us understand what it takes to make a school great and how to sustain that greatness over time." So begins the introductory narration to *A Year at Mission Hill*. This 10-part video series chronicles a year in the life of one of America's most successful public schools in urban Boston, founded in 1997 by educator and author Deborah Meier. Narrated by Sam Chaltain, the author of *American Schools: The Art of Creating a Democratic Learning Community*, and *blogger for Education Week*, the video series provides its audience with a focused look at a progressive, highly democratic environment where freedom and autonomy, creativity, strong community and close relationships are institutionally valued. Despite its focus on public education, the series offers value to independent school leaders interested in investigating the critical question of what makes a school great. The site itself allows viewers to join in interactive conversations about the series via Twitter and explore a treasure trove of additional links and resources ranging from readings to TED talks.

Jen Hyatt, Burr and Burton Academy, VT

ayearatmissionhill.com, 2013



A Wellspring

Resource: The Teaching Channel

Imagine having access to a YouTube style video repository of lesson plans and models of solid classroom teaching. How might this upgrade professional development and the exchange of effective practice? The Teaching Channel explores this question with a video showcase of what it bills as "inspiring and effective teaching practices in America's schools." A nonprofit organization supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the teaching Channel's mission is to "revolutionize how teachers learn, connect and inspire each other to improve the outcomes for all K-12 students across America." This sample video is an example: <https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/stem-lesson-ideas-heat-loss-project>. This 13-minute video captures a lesson on heat transfer for middle school students. The students use a project-based inquiry method that involves building paper houses and using iPad cameras' thermometers to assess heat transfer.

Christopher J. Lauricella, The Park School of Buffalo, NY

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/tag>



Taking on the Virtual Bully: The Matrix Redux or Practical Solution?

Social Media Sites, Scientists and Hackers Unite to Prevent Cyberbullying, by Emily Bazelon

Emily Bazelon's article "How to Stop the Bullies," an excerpt from her book, *Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy*, enlightens us about what computer scientists, insiders at Facebook and even members of the hacker group, Anonymous, are doing to prevent cyberbullying from spreading. Searching for alternative solutions to this slippery problem, Bazelon examines two groups trying to prevent the spread and culture of cyberbullying. One group, led by Professor Henry Lieberman, comprises a group of graduate students working on a computer program that recognizes harassing text before that text spreads viral damage. In a more dramatic move, the hacker group, Anonymous, teams up with victims of bullying to "out" their attackers by hacking into their personal and Twitter accounts as a way of publicizing their behavior. Bazelon also challenges the social media giant, Facebook, about its responsibility to address or prevent this problem. While she finds that the company is responsive to many of the complaints about bullying and inappropriate content, the average of 10 seconds spent on each case is not enough to delete content before it does real harm. Is it time for consumers to demand that social media sites be more accountable about enforcing their own rules?

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

The Atlantic Magazine, March 2013



An Iconoclastic Challenge: Discourage Originality!

Uncreative Writing: Redefining Language and Authorship in the Digital Age, by Maria Popova

If you haven't discovered Maria Popova's *Brainpickings* project (<http://www.brainpickings.org/>), you have missed a steady stream of masterful interdisciplinary curios guaranteed to either inform or inspire your work in education. Recently, Popova whittled her way through a distinguished list of sources à la "ranging from Mark Twain to Charles Eames à la" to reassess *Uncreative Writing*, a book by experimental writer and influential teacher Kenneth Goldsmith. Goldsmith's definition of writing foregrounds the activity of working with the texts of others (including, but not limited to, the literal cutting and pasting of those texts into one's own. Goldsmith teaches a writing class at UPenn where students are "penalized for any semblance of originality." Instead of generating their own words, they must compose their assignments by "repurposing, sampling and outright stealing" the words of others. Though these ideas seem heretical in college prep writing programs, Popova deftly positions them in a tradition going back to the Middle Ages. At the very least then, there is a healthy challenge to our traditional writing assignments, research programs and definitions of plagiarism. And if we're not willing to accept that challenge, at least this article introduces us to Maria Popova who, love or leave Kenneth Goldsmith, is daily forging a delightful path through the history and future of ideas.

Stephen J. Valentine, Montclair Kimberley Academy, NJ

www.brainpickings.org

BOOKS



Undoing a Pervasive Addiction

The Slow Fix: Solve Problems, Work Smarter and Live Better in a World Addicted to Speed, by Carl Honoré

Carl Honoré, an articulate champion of Slow, a movement that encompasses not only slow food, but slow medicine, cities, businesses, schools and children's schedules, takes aim at the quick fix. He questions the bestsellers that promote the 60 second solutions and in-the-blink-of-an-eye timelines. His new book extends his critique of the "ethos of hurry." He makes the case for valuing collaboration, consensus and patience over multi-tasking and short-term responses. Pressure to move quickly toward answers, he says, usually produces superficial solutions that are unsatisfactory because they do not have a long horizon in view. His examples are international in scope, both familiar and new. In each case, he highlights the importance of finding the real root of a problem, learning from mistakes, consulting with those closest to the issue, and listening. He consistently makes three simple points: slow is not weak, time is not the enemy, and deliberate thinking is not optional. Though occasionally slipping into self-help language, Honoré's book is in itself a slow fix that requires the hard work of deep reflection. Avoiding the quick fix may produce better, more lasting and more humane solutions that have the added benefit of building the capacity for a more reflective social community.

Elizabeth Morley
Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study Laboratory School
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto, Canada

Random House, 2013



Synchronizing Human Minds and Digital Tools

The Anti-Education Era: Creating Smarter Students through Digital Learning, by James Paul Gee

If you are looking for advice about how to incorporate digital learning directly into the classroom, this is not the book. Instead, building on decades of study into linguistics and gaming theory, Gee advocates a theory of learning that places digital learning at the center of conversations about global education. While admitting that digital and social media can lead to greater social isolation and deeper fragmentation of knowledge, Gee nevertheless encourages readers to envision how digital learning might assist in the process of shifting learning from acquiring mere "content knowledge" to more creative and meaningful appropriation of the truth. Supported by parents and teachers, learners embark on a search for both empirical truth and personal and social meaning. Empirical analysis allows learners to work collectively to break the stranglehold of dominant ideologies and "groupthink" to see reality as it is. Mentors likewise link learners with each other in digital affinity groups to explore complex, systemic questions of deep significance. In such affinity groups, students synchronize their own intelligences, which encourage learners to build both status (self-worth and grit) and solidarity (seeing themselves as actors bringing voices to needed global changes).

Steve Noga, Xavier High School, NY

Palgrave Macmillan, 2013



The Death of a Salesman

To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others, by Daniel Pink

Pink is at his best with his latest book. What makes it so relevant to education is that he uses the notion of selling a service, something we all do almost unconsciously--convincing a group of students to learn a concept, asking the boss for a raise, or helping a patient understand the need for a procedure. With *To Sell is Human*, Pink argues that not only has the landscape for sales changed, but in fact most people, teachers included, whether they know it or not, are in sales in one form or another. The ABC's of sales no longer reflect the mantra of "Always Be Closing" but have been replaced by "Attainment, Buoyancy, and Clarity" - skills from which teachers and students alike can benefit. And though the clearest educational connection to traditional sales is in the admission office, the relevance extends well beyond. What is "selling" if not convincing reluctant people to part with resources in order to gain some greater good? For students in a classroom, those resources may be time, energy, and competing interests. While no teacher wants to be a salesman explicitly, we still have to convince our students that what we "sell" them is worth the effort, whether the "buying" is required or not. (Note: this text was suggested by two contributors this month and the Editors, finding both digests worthy, have agreed to merge them)

Ryan Kimmet, New Canaan Country School, CT
Dane Peters, Brooklyn Heights Montessori School, NY

Riverhead Books, 2012



Bullying in the Modern Age

Sticks and Stones: Defeating the Culture of Bullying and Rediscovering the Power of Character and Empathy, by Emily Bazelon

A longitudinal study, published recently in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA), reports that childhood bullying has impact on a person long beyond the time that it occurs and negatively affects both perpetrator and victim. Bullying is a big deal, in other words, rather than an ephemeral "kids will be kids" phenomenon. Emily Bazelon's new book examines bullying by using the experiences of a number of kids, connects the problem to the need for specific character-building, and contemplates the problem in the modern age of Facebook and Twitter. Cyberbullying can be especially pernicious because perpetrators rarely have to confront their victims (cyberspace feels despersonalized) and the piling-on that occurs can explode. (See related selection above under "Articles, Blogs and Other Media"). Bullies often use aliases so their identity is hidden, while the victims are humiliated publicly by particularly vicious language and sometimes compromising photographs. The author offers good advice for prevention, but the real value of this book is its look at the modern problems that have stymied teachers and administrators in the electronic age.

Bruce Shaw, Bruce A Shaw Consulting
Trustee, Glen Urquhart School, MA

Random House, 2013



Hopeful Fiction that Enlivens a National Theme

Wonder, by R. J. Palacio

Every middle school teacher should read what many middle school students are currently reading: *Wonder*. Written by R. J. Palacio, *Wonder* tells the story of a young boy named August who has mandibulofacial dysostosis, a condition that renders him with extreme facial abnormalities from birth. In the story, August bravely goes from being home schooled to enrolling in a private middle school in Manhattan. At Beecher Prep, August endures the gawking glances and cruel remarks of classmates, while simultaneously discovering the beauty of true friendship and the reward of persevering through it all. A lovely, thought-provoking book, *Wonder* provides a timely complement to the national discussion on bullying. It brings to the forefront the sanguine nature of young children and the nascent hope that things get better, that heroes are plentiful, and that behaviors can be understood and addressed in lieu of reliance on polarizing labels that unjustly simplify the complex landscape of our schools.

Patrick Nelligan, St. Anne's Episcopal School, CO

Alfred A. Knopf, 2012

To submit comments or suggestions, or to request that the newsletter be sent to a colleague, contact Adele Tonge, Communications Manager at klingbrief@tc.columbia.edu.

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