

To Know Him

About a Boy: Transgender surgery at sixteen, by Margaret Talbot

This expansive *New Yorker* article offers something uncommon and worthwhile. The subject is a transgendered high school senior, who, we are told, attends a good school, gets good grades, and has a supportive, middle-class family. He does not try to speak for all transgendered teenagers; instead, he simply tells his own story with unusual clarity and a style that takes the reader into his confidence. The author, the *New Yorker's* Margaret Talbot, shows a notable restraint. One of the article's strongest attributes, and the aspect that makes it valuable for educators, is that every paragraph advances understanding without coming to any conclusions. We get a partial glimpse of one young life at a moment of decision and a period of ensuing change, and we can't quite go back to not knowing it. Sure, Talbot includes expert views, research, statistics, and context, but she uses these devices in service of what the boy wants us to know - what it feels like to be this particular transgendered person. Many related texts serve as readymade discussion prompts for our school communities; while this text could certainly serve that purpose, it also serves two higher ones, modeling respect and empathy.

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

The New Yorker, March 2013

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ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



Reporting on Report Cards

School report cards, then and now: What's changed?, by Todd R. Nelson

Depending on the frequency of narrative report cards and the guidelines each school administration dictates for them, many in our ilk - regardless of years of teaching - look at the comment writing process with trepidation. That fear can stem from a host of issues: the timing of major assessments in relation to the deadline of submitting/uploading the comments, the urging on the part of administrators to really "tell it like it is," or the avoidance of courting controversy with certain kinds of parents (i.e., helicopter, grade-obsessed, or fixed-mindset ones). In this timely, meditative piece (given that many of us are currently anticipating an upcoming round of comments), Todd R. Nelson reminds us that the narrative report card should serve as a medium through which the partnership between home and school is fostered and cultivated. Yes, data is important, but so is the analysis of the expert (we, the teachers) in providing a digest of each student's performance. If nothing else, such an article will prompt us to ask ourselves the basic, yet powerful question: How do my comments support the mission of my school in educating students in a particular way, at a particular time?

Eric M. Jimenez, William Penn Charter, Philadelphia PA

The Christian Science Monitor, October 18, 2013



Coding in Math Class ... and English Class, Too

Coding the Curriculum: How High Schools are Reprogramming Their Classes, by Erica Larson

Though topical in nature, this article is a worthy entrance point to the coding conversation that many independent schools are having or bound to have. Beaver Country Day's approach is, according to Mashable author Erica Larson, both "new" and "eccentric," making Beaver Country Day the "first school in the United States to implement computer coding in each of its classes." Yes, the English teachers as well as the math teachers are tinkering with the backend language that drives the software driving much of our world. One can't deny that Beaver Country Day has answered the call of many educational insiders and outsiders who feel that our students should engage more deeply in all things STEM. At the same time, the school honors a prevalent technological credo: *it's not about the tool*. Its students don't code continuously; rather, they turn to programming to solve problems. That some prefer Python to calculators is the point. Though the scope of the article doesn't allow it either to untangle the "rigorous planning" that facilitated the program or to fully present the school culture that allows for such bold experimentation, it offers a glimpse at a model to consider - among others - as we make the curricular choices that will propel our schools into the future (or past).

Stephen J. Valentine, Montclair Kimberley Academy, New Jersey

Mashable.com, September 22, 2013



Caution: The Marshmallows May Be Stale

American Schools are Failing Nonconformist Kids. Here's How, by Elizabeth Weil

In this pithy, unruly essay, Elizabeth Weil examines schools' emphasis on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) through the lens of her "transgressively funny" second grade daughter, who has been recommended for Occupational Therapy because of a perceived inability to self-regulate. Initially, Weil is upset that her daughter is not more like the "kid in the marshmallow study," but this regret passes quickly as she renames him a "savant of delayed gratification." The article goes on to offer both a primer on SEL and sharp-tongued, at times hilarious critiques on the range of theories that undergird it. In Weil's hands, self-regulation and emotional intelligence, two prominent trends in education, are partially debunked by research studies, and classroom management is re-characterized as "political philosophy writ small." Weil also challenges the reader to examine the effect of these programs on students who might be unable to comply with them, as well as the effect these programs may be having on society in general. Apparently, we are becoming less creative by the decade. What's more, we are in danger of losing faith in young people, a posture that runs counter to any independent school mission. The article provides an interesting, counter-cultural perspective at a time when so many schools are actively promoting "grit" and "soft-skills."

Christopher J. Lauricella, The Park School, NY

The New Republic, September 2, 2013



Seeing the Visual

The ASIDE Blog, American Society for Innovation Design Education

The American Society for Innovation Design Education (ASIDE), co-founded by independent school teachers Mercer Hall and Patricia Russac, publishes a blog that illuminates the visual discourse embedded in the communication and design of 21st Century information. Rooted in the principle that design thinking transforms the way children learn, the ASIDE blog features thematic posts exploring visual representations of current events and popular culture. Whether writing about the complexities of the Syrian conflict or the implicit messaging of Superbowl commercials, Hall and Russac find an exciting and approachable way to differentiate instruction and to inspire divergent thought. Their vision of learners as makers and doers is evident in their prose; each post prompts the reader to engage in a dialectical relationship with media, to both question it and to create it. The ASIDE Blog also hosts an impressive catalogue of K-12 curricular resources, including: an infographics library, a compendium of inspiring student projects, a catalog of visual education blogs, and a bibliography of scholarly resources. Their Design in Education Paper.li gathers a daily compilation of best resources and practices published across the web and @theASIDEblog frequently tweets tools for interdisciplinary applications.

Gina Siple, Buckley Country Day School, NY

The Aside Blog



America's Finest: Another Wake-up Call

Teaching Math to the Talented
Which countries - and states - are producing high-achieving students?

by Eric A. Hanushek, Paul E. Peterson and Ludger Woessmann

Lately, many educators have been wringing their hands about the state of STEM education in the US, and this distress seems warranted as our economic future depends on matching American workers to the jobs of the future, which will require high levels of mathematical reasoning, facility with statistics, and technical entrepreneurship. In this alarming article, researchers from Stanford, Harvard, and the University of Munich, consider the US's performance on the NAEP (the National Assessment of Educational Progress) and the PISA (the Program for International Student Assessment) as compared to other industrialized countries. Unlike other studies, however, which have focused on students who are at the bottom and lack proficiency, these scholars look specifically at the performances of American students considered to be highly advanced in math. The news here is also dismal. The most talented American students in both public and private schools underperform considerably thirty industrialized countries. Even when the researchers factored out the performances of non-white students or students whose parents had not earned a college degree, American students still trail other countries in terms of numbers of students who earn an advanced score on both exams. This sobering, carefully researched article offers another wake up call to the US to focus its attention on improving STEM education, especially for our most talented students.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM

Education Next, Winter 2011

BOOKS



Habits of a Lifetime

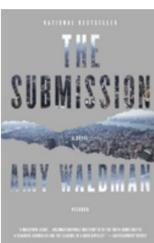
Great Habits, Great Readers: A Practical Guide for K-4 Reading in the Light of Common Core, by Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, Aja Settles, and Juliana Worrell

Common Core State Standards Initiative | [The Standards](http://www.corestandards.org/)
<http://www.corestandards.org/>

The adoption of the common core, now in forty-five states, has generated numerous publications to assist teachers in meeting rigorous standards in language arts and mathematics. Though this book, too, incorporates common core elements, it will likely appeal to independent school teachers, especially at the primary level, because it focuses on how to teach the habits of successful readers in the lower grades. By inculcating habits of skilled reading we can help students succeed in other academic disciplines, as well. The initial chapters help teachers deepen thinking through discussion techniques and increase instructional time. The authors claim that teachers in the lower grades can save up to sixty hours a year by developing habits of efficient classroom transitions and routines. Such time-saving requires precise language on the part of teachers and a lot of practice with students. Along with nurturing habits for skilled reading, the book offers advice on developing assessments to analyze student learning. The final chapters on coaching and professional development brings the text full circle, providing a blueprint for helping teachers develop the habits that result in great readers. (The book includes a DVD with video clips of master teachers demonstrating the techniques that are described in the text.)

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center, NY

John Wiley & Sons, 2013



A Jumble of Multicultural Identities

The Submission, by Amy Waldman

Two years after 9/11, a group of jurors will decide which design to choose for the public memorial to the dead at the demolished World Trade Center in Manhattan. The jury has seen only the designs, and not the designers' identities. When they choose a winner and then open the envelope that reveals the designer's name - Mohammed Kahn - excitement turns to disbelief and then, quickly, to violent opposition. The characters that populate this novel are the families of firefighters who lost lives, politicians, illegal immigrants from Muslim countries, liberals and conservatives, bloggers, picketers and the media. The Muslim world of America itself is displayed in all its heterogeneity, complete with suspicions, disagreements, and opposing worldviews. Talk radio whips up anger and disgusted liberals can't manage their own conflicted feelings; meanwhile, politicians and journalists use the situation for personal advantage. At the epicenter is Mo Kahn, the architect, who happens to have been born, raised and educated in America and is a non-practicing Muslim. Author Amy Waldman's subject is prejudice in many forms. She takes no sides, instead showing deep conflicts that describe perfectly the divisions among people. It is little wonder that schools struggle so much with a topic so difficult.

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

Picador, 2012

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

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