

## The Hardest Job Keeps Getting Harder

Modern parenthood: Roles of moms and dads converge as they balance work and family

The Pew Research Center's 2013 study of parents takes some of the guesswork out of understanding the mothers and fathers who arrive at our school doors each day. The joys and stresses of parenting are individual, of course, but the Pew's look at social trends across time for modern parents provides insights from which administrators and teachers can learn. Each section of the report's findings could inspire understanding, appreciation and compassion for the people represented by the statistics on changing roles in modern parenting. The report has three main assets for educators. First, it asks pertinent, broad and informing questions: What percentage of parents consider themselves to be happy and successful in their childrearing and does this change by income, workplace satisfaction, race, age, family structure and gender? Are stay-at-home parents or working parents reporting more satisfaction with childrearing? In which sector of society is the largest shift in parental roles taking place? Second, the report organizes the results in a way that is easy to use and apply. Third, the study identifies trends over time - the very thing we need to understand to support our school families fully in the changing landscape of modern parenthood.

Elizabeth Morley, The Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study, University of Toronto, Canada

Pew Research Center, 2013

Klingbrief is a free, monthly publication of recommended articles, books, research reports and media selected by and for independent school educators. The Klingenstein Center for Independent School Leadership provides graduate programs and professional development for independent school educators throughout their careers. For information about submitting to Klingbrief, please click [here](#).

## ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



## Why are They Sitting in Front of That Painting?

The Power of Patience, by Jennifer L. Roberts

This article from *Harvard Magazine* by Jennifer L. Roberts, Elizabeth Cary Agassiz Professor of the Humanities, Harvard College Professor and Chair of the Program in American Studies, crystallizes a response to a contemporary instructional dilemma: how, in an era of educational "disruption," the key elements of which are fast paced reliance on instant vision and communication, should good teaching unfold? More and more, as the assault on patience and focus becomes a way of life, these qualities of executive function need to be consciously trained as not so much an antidote but a counterbalance. Professor Roberts alludes to the importance of what she calls "deceleration" and "immersive attention." (Longtime readers in education might recognize other synonyms like breadth and concentration.) The article describes Roberts' work in art history with university students who are required to sit still in front of a Copley painting for three hours before beginning their research. Moving from the impatient pace of acquiring knowledge to some element of zen-like focus and long-term effort is a shift that is gaining, and will gain, traction. As we consider how the structure of schooling and notions of time are changing, it may be helpful to gather a library of eloquent reminders such as the article linked here.

Peter Herzberg and Ian Rowe, Public Preparatory Network, NY

Harvard Magazine, November-December 2013



## Empathy Lag and the Lazy Phrase

Teens Are Still Developing Empathy Skills: Vital Social Skill Ebbs and Flows in Adolescent Boys; How to Cultivate Sensitivity , by Sue Shellenbarger

*Boys will be boys*, a phrase often maligned for its lazy justification of antisocial behavior among male youth, may contain a kernel of truth. In a recent piece on the *Wall Street Journal's* Work and Family blog, Sue Shellenbarger cites research that shows adolescent boys trail girls in their development of empathy. The six-year study conducted by the Research Centre for Adolescent Development at Utrecht University draws two significant conclusions. First, boys' cognitive empathy, the ability to take others' perspectives, doesn't begin to develop until age fifteen, two years after girls'. Second, boys show a temporary decline in affective empathy, the ability to recognize feelings in others, between the ages of thirteen and sixteen. Taken together with social forces that tend to prize stereotypical male behavior such as stoicism and competition, it is easy to see why adolescent and pre-adolescent boys find themselves on the wrong side of authority figures, and why those conversations can seem frustrating to both sides. While Shellenbarger offers no single solution, she cites numerous experts in the fields of psychology and cognitive neuroscience in identifying experiences that mitigate the effects of empathy lag. By challenging boys to "walk in others' shoes" and creating opportunities for empathic conversations, schools may avoid some of the most patterned and predictable misbehavior. They may even change the trajectories of some boys' lives.

Jared Baird, Marin Academy, CA  
Ed.M. Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

Wall Street Journal, October 15, 2013



## The Really Big Questions, Revisited

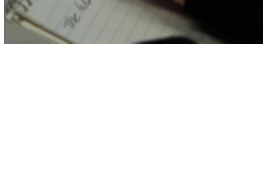
Should Literature be Useful? , by Lee Siegel  
<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2013/11/should-literature-be-useful.html#entry-more>

Why Teach English?, by Adam Gopnik  
<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2013/08/why-teach-english.html>

In a spirit of John Dewey, two short essays on the *New Yorker's* "Page Turner" blog explore fundamental questions about what we do in the English classroom, and more generally, in schools today. Lee Siegel and Adam Gopnik reach moving conclusions as they probe the purposes and goals of engaging with literature. "If art is made *ex nihilo* - out of nothing - then reading is done *in nihilo*, or into nothing," Siegel asserts, in a challenge to conventional notions of education's endgame. Questioning the supremacy of practical usefulness in our "moment of ardent quantifying," Siegel ponders recent studies' conclusions linking reading fiction and acquiring empathy. Ultimately, though, Siegel would rather celebrate the ways in which fiction lends us the freedom and joy to escape the modern urgency to derive some form of profit from every activity, every keystroke. Comparably, Gopnik questions the usefulness of studying or teaching English. He, too, avoids the obvious - English majors "make better people" and "better societies" - in favour of something hidden in plain sight. We should study English because we like reading and believe it is worth doing. Paired with Siegel, Gopnik invites us to reconsider our students' and our own relationships to fields of study.

Meghan S. Tally, The American School in London, England  
Ed.M. Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

www.newyorker.com



## Shaping Letters, Shaping Minds

How Handwriting Trains the Brain, by Gwendolyn Bounds

As technology takes hold in increasingly permanent ways, some parents and teachers have begun to view the teaching of certain skills, like handwriting, as outmoded and unnecessary. As documented in this brief article from the *Wall Street Journal*, recent neurological research using MRI technology has given some hard evidence to what many elementary school teachers and teachers of geometry have long intuited: shaping letters using one's hands is a way that the brain ensures the commitment of knowledge to long-term memory. Even for adults, learning to write a new alphabet - Chinese or Arabic, for example - can sharpen focus and improve memory of what has been learned. Keyboarding simply does not have the same impact. Some technology companies are responding to a renewed valuing of the importance of handwriting, creating software that allows kids to actually shape letters with a stylus or finger on their various screens. Regardless, the article is another reminder to pace ourselves as we respond to the tidal wave of technological change that is rocking our educational systems. More pragmatically, it's a handy reference for anyone likely to field a query from the parent of an elementary school child about why students are still being asked to write, and learn, by hand.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM

Wall Street Journal, Oct. 5, 2010



## Endorsers, Fence Sitters, Resisters and You

The Network Secrets of Great Change Agents , by Julie Battilana and Tiziana Casciaro

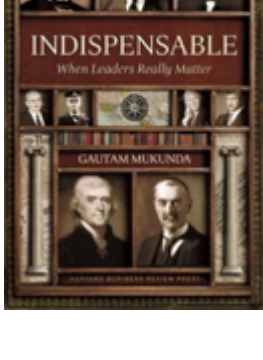
[This article was published in the *Harvard Business Review*. If you log into HBR you can get it free but it is available without having to log with the URL above.]

People resist change initiatives - whether in schools, corporations or non-profit organizations - because these initiatives disrupt established power structures and usual ways of doing things. As such, change agents must continually seek new approaches to their work. A study of change efforts conducted in the UK's National Health Service offers some useful advice. Its major finding is that personal networks - relationships with colleagues - are critical to success in implementing change. There are three related findings: First, in bringing about change, what matters most is not one's title or formal authority in the hierarchy; being central in a network of people who respect and trust you is far more important. Second, dramatic changes, involving several departments or divisions, for example, are best executed by people who have built genuine connections with people in different, disconnected groups. Third, dependent on the change, identifying those who are endorsers, fence sitters or resisters is critical. Endorsers can serve as ambassadors in winning over others. Fence sitters may see drawbacks to a change initiative, but they also see potential benefits; investing time with them is worthwhile. For educators in leadership positions, change and change management may be the only constants. The findings of this study underscore that such work can be approached strategically.

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center, NY

Harvard Business Review, 00178012, Jul/Aug2013, Vol. 91, Issue 7

## BOOKS



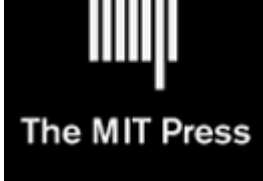
## Leadership Unfiltered

Indispensable: When Leaders Really Matter, by Gautam Mukunda

With so many leadership books on the market, it is rare to find one with a truly fresh perspective. Gautam Mukunda, a Harvard Business School assistant professor, boldly claims that "under most circumstances, it doesn't matter who ends up as leader" and that "it is time to abandon the idea that there's any sort of generic 'right leader.'" *Indispensable: When Leaders Really Matter* offers new insights about effective leaders and the processes employed to select them. Mukunda writes about two types of leaders: those who arrive to leadership heavily filtered and well known and those who ascend in unorthodox ways and are relatively unknown. The text presents myriad case studies and examples from politics, business and science to prove that "a filtered leader provides the considerable upside potential of an able executive whom you can be relatively certain is competent, sane, knowledgeable and capable." Mukunda makes the uncomfortable claim, though, that filtered leaders may be easily substituted, one for the other, and that they may not thrive in conditions that do not resemble the ones in which they earned their stripes. It's the unfiltered leader that has the potential to be a "great triumph." Or a "great disaster."

Kurt Christiansen, Culver Academies, IN  
Ed.M. Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

Harvard Business Review Press, 2012



## Where is Your School?

The Future of the Curriculum: School Knowledge in the Digital Age, by Ben Williamson

The impact of technology on students of every age has been debated in such books as *The Shallows* by Nicholas Carr (2010) and *Born Digital* by John Palfrey and Urs Gasser (2008), as well as hundreds of articles. Yet, little attention has been paid to the educational research about technology's value in redesigning school curriculum. In a recent report funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Ben Williamson, a Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Stirling in the United Kingdom, responds to the question, "What might be the future of curriculum in the digital age?" Using research from innovative programs in the United States, Great Britain, and Australia, Williamson concludes that curriculum in the digital age is likely to become more decentralized as individuals and organizations outside of schools exert greater influence on determining both curriculum content and its methods of delivery. The book will encourage you to think about fluid networks where you once thought about specific content areas and traditional skills. Additionally, it will offer - firmly - what should be a mere reminder by now: learning takes places in multiple places and ways, not just in the classroom.

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

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2013



## In Search of Understanding

The Reason I Jump: The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism, by Naoki Higashida, translated by David Mitchell

Originally published in 2007 in Japan, this fascinating, first-hand account of life with autism has just been released in its English translation. David Mitchell, father to a son with autism, pinpoints the book's uniqueness: having been "composed by a writer still with one foot in childhood," it gave Mitchell a sense for the first time of his own son and what was "happening inside his head." The format of the book revolves around author Naoki Higashida's answers to the questions people tend to have about autism. Additionally, he answers more common, everyday questions in ways that cast light on his developing narrative. When asked to identify his favorite TV shows, for example, he replies: "People with autism get quite a kick out of repetition. If I was asked how come, my reply would be this: 'When you're in a strange new place, aren't you relieved too if you run into a friendly, familiar face?'" As the book nears its conclusion, its narrator speaks for all with autism when he announces to the world, "We are misunderstood, and we'd give anything if only we could be understood properly." Higashida has contributed admirably to the very understanding he seeks.

Malcolm Gauld, Hyde School, ME

Random House, 2013

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](mailto:klingbrief@tc.columbia.edu).

To support Klingenstein Center scholarships and program endowment, please [make your gift here](#).

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/>

