

**March of the Zombie Sheep**

*Don't Send Your Kid to the Ivy League*, by William Deresiewicz.  
*Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, by William Deresiewicz

While teaching in the Ivy League schools he now chides, William Deresiewicz increasingly worked with students who lacked passion about ideas. The trouble, according to Deresiewicz, stemmed from an admissions process so constrained by an outlandish notion of perfection that it produces only terror and an aversion to risk. Should you miss the point in the title of his recent *New Republic* article, he provides an equally unsubtle subtitle: "The nation's top colleges are turning our kids into zombies." Deresiewicz switches metaphors but not themes in his recent book, *Excellent Sheep*. He reserves particular scorn for the SAT and *US World and News Report* college rankings. Deresiewicz also takes to task the idea of meritocracy, examining a "professional class" who have been educated almost exclusively at Harvard, Yale, or Princeton and occupy a preponderance of leadership positions in various key institutions, including the federal government. *Excellent Sheep*, like Deresiewicz's recent essay, is by no means perfect. It hyper-focuses on all that is wrong with the current state of university education and ignores the bright spots, such as the independent school graduates who enter college knowing who they are and why they are there. Nonetheless, Deresiewicz's prose serves both a curricular and moral function for independent schools. It promotes a vision of liberal arts education that opposes narrow, discipline-specific curriculum geared towards a single profession. And, agree with him or not, it's tough to deny that Deresiewicz is the clearest stand-in for Chekov's hammer that independent school educators have seen in years.

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*The New Republic*, July, 2014  
*Free Press, Simon & Schuster Inc.*, 2014

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ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



**Rising to Meet the Majority Minority**

*U.S. School Enrollment Hits Majority-Minority Milestone*, by Lesli A. Maxwell

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (*Projections of Education Statistics to 2022*) reveals a demographic shift expected this fall when the number of Latino, African-American, and Asian K-12 students in public schools are expected to surpass non-Hispanic whites. This collective "majority minority" is largely driven by an increase in the Latino populations and a slight decrease in the white population. According to NCES projections, between 2011 and 2022 the numbers will continue to increase: 33 percent for Hispanic students, 20 percent for Asian/Pacific Islanders, and 44 percent for students who are in two or more groups. While the population shift will play out differently across regions and localities, the implications present challenges and opportunities for public and private schools and for the welfare of our country. Many of these students will be living in poverty and require English-language learning, but students in all schools will need to embrace diversity in ways that prepare them to live, work, and thrive in a truly diverse nation. Cultural competence will be an imperative for students in American schools and for their teachers, who are predominantly white (82 percent), as will a consideration of language requirements. To prepare students for the world they will inherit, private schools will need to become more reflective of the American population at large and more receptive to families from diverse backgrounds.

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center, NY

Hussar, W.J., and Bailey, T.M. (2013). *Projections of Education Statistics to 2022* (NCES 2014-051). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

*Education Week*, August 19, 2014



**Play Works**

*Less-structured time in children's daily lives predicts self-directed executive functioning*, by Jane E. Barker, Andrei D. Semenov, Laura Michaelson, Lindsay S. Provan, Hannah R. Snyder, and Yuko Munakata

Families often return to school reporting with a wistful, almost guilty pleasure that they achieved something rare and treasured during the holidays – down time. A new study that investigates the relationship between children's time use and their developing cognition gives evidence-based encouragement to continue to offer less-structured time for children throughout the school year, as well. The study by University of Colorado researchers finds significant correlation between children who have some time to self-direct their activities and those with relatively high executive functioning. This finding has meaning for families, and it goes some distance toward addressing parents' questions about the optimal balance among school time, scheduled out-of-school time, and time for things like imaginative play, choosing a book and reading it on one's own, or building a fort. Results showed that when children have more opportunities to choose what they will do and when, their capacity for self-direction increases. Educators, too, have an interest in steadying the scaffolding around the development of self-direction as it in turn correlates strongly to increased school readiness and academic performance. The results of this quiet yet complex study support thoughtful choices by parents and teachers.

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

*Frontiers in Psychology*, June, 2014



**A Failing Calculus**

*The Children We Mean to Raise: The Real Message Adults Are Sending About Values*, by Rick Wiessbourd and Stephanie Jones

This ambitious study published by Harvard's Making Caring Common Project (MCC) offers captivating insights into students' decision-making. To gauge the moral calculus of America's middle and high school students, MCC surveyed over 10,000 secondary school students from a wide spectrum of backgrounds. Their findings offer a great challenge to parents, teachers, and school leaders. Weissbourd and Jones open with the central assertion that a strong, healthy society "depends on adults who are committed to their communities and who, at times, will put the common good before their own." Their research suggests that, on the whole, our schools are not cultivating leaders who embrace this perspective. By a considerable margin, students averred that their own individual happiness and personal achievement were their top priorities. Caring for others was a distant third. Especially disquieting is the stark disconnect between what parents and educators espouse as educational priorities and what students think their teachers and parents value most. Weissbourd and Jones' report offers some suggestions for how to mend this inconsistency, but more important, their study provides a useful starting point for us to consider earnestly what kind of character education we are really offering in our schools.

Clay Gahan, Louisville Collegiate School, KY

*Harvard Graduate School of Education*, June 25, 2014



**Got Code?**

*Is Coding the New Literacy?*, by Tasneem Raja

In this insightful and readable essay, Tasneem Raja argues that coding and thinking computationally are becoming a new and transformational literacy. While countries like Vietnam and the UK seem to be seizing the momentum by instituting nationalized computer science curricula at both the elementary and secondary levels, the U.S. is actually losing ground. Fewer U.S. teachers are teaching computer science, and students are moving away from the limited number of courses that are offered. Raja believes strongly that it is not coding *per se* that is so important to teach; instead, students should understand the potential that computers offer as tools to solve problems in all fields, from medicine to city planning to literary analysis. Furthermore, if the emphasis in computer classes moves toward the idea of computational thinking, Raja believes that girls and students of color will be more likely to gravitate toward these classes, which are currently dominated to a very large degree by white males. Weaving together intriguing examples of diverse problems solved by coding with an appeal to democratize an increasingly vital field, Raja's essay should be deeply persuasive to those who want to look honestly and seriously at innovation in schooling in the 21st century.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy

*Mother Jones*, June 16, 2014



**Second Hand Smoke**

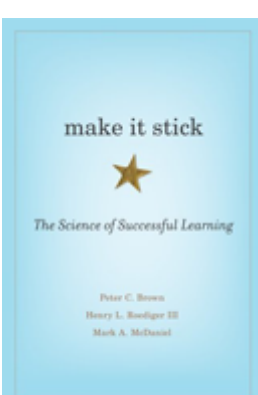
*Why I Just Asked My Students to Put Their Laptops Away*, by Clay Shirky

Clay Shirky has long been known as a booster of the transformative power of the Internet. People who have followed his thinking will therefore be almost shocked to find him justifying a near-ban on laptop use in his classroom. What brought him to this? Partly it's the drip-drip of scientific studies, referenced in this piece, that show the risks to learning that come from multitasking and electronic distraction. Even more important is Shirky's own experience. Increasingly, he found that electronic distraction was a problem in his own classroom, lowering the quality of discussions. When he asks students to close their laptops, he finds, "it's as if someone has let fresh air into the room." Electronic distraction, he suggests, citing yet another study, is like second-hand smoke: it's something you do to yourself and something that drags down the people around you. What should a conscientious teacher do? Talking with students about the studies Shirky references is a first step. Establishing clear laptop rules to enable students who want to learn is another. As more schools consider, adopt, or evolve 1:1 programs, Shirky's provocative and surprising piece should be part of the conversation.

David Korfhage, Montclair Kimberley Academy, Montclair, New Jersey

*Medium.com*, September 9, 2014

BOOKS



**Against Intuition For Learning**

*Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*, by Peter Brown, et. al.

In *Make It Stick*, cognitive scientists Henry Roediger and Mark McDaniel collaborate with writer Peter Brown to illuminate research on cognitive memory and provide applicable strategies to support highly effective instruction and learning. Peppered with memorable anecdotes and a decade of empirical research, the book identifies techniques that strengthen durable memory and support deep thinking. Some of the best strategies are not intuitive. Suggesting that overconfidence in our abilities creates the illusion of mastery, the authors endorse strategies that require effort. For example, mixing up types of problems when studying – interleaved practice – feels slower, but research shows that such a technique greatly improves mastery and long-term retention. Self-quizzing – a form of retrieval practice – is another noted technique. The authors quote a teacher who tells students to think of the brain like a forest, with memories stored everywhere; when you quiz yourself, you make a path to the memory. The final chapter distills the research into tips for students, lifelong learners, and teachers. *Make It Stick* is a concise and engaging book that will resonate with readers who are both fascinated by the science of the human brain and who wish to integrate strategies that will make an indelible impact on learning and memory.

Elizabeth A. Perry, St. Lukes School, CT  
Thu-Nga Ho, Ed.M. Candidate, The Klingenstein Center  
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*Harvard University Press*, 2014



**Locking Out Lock-In**

*Reproducing Racism: How Everyday Choices Lock in White Advantage*, by Daria Roithmayr

Although heaps of statistics plainly demonstrate that black and brown people in the United States remain significantly behind their white counterparts on metrics such as family wealth, property value, compensation, and health outcomes, when we search for root causes, many theories come up lacking. USC law professor Daria Roithmayr takes a different route in pursuing the question of why these disparities persist. Drawing on research from law, sociology, and economics, Roithmayr proposes the lock-in model which suggests that early anticompetitive measures taken by whites in the fields of employment, housing, and education, for example, create feedback loops of behaviors that are essentially self-perpetuating. She argues that even if all discriminatory practices were to cease today, the disparities between whites and people of color in the United States would persist. To combat this phenomenon of lock-in, she proposes that bolder steps be taken to interrupt these feedback loops that have become so ingrained in our everyday transactions. For independent schools, this may mean examining more deeply our connections to the communities in which we operate and seeking to build bridges that go far beyond achieving more diversity in the admissions process.

Sherri Spelic, Leadership Coaching, Vienna, Austria

*NYU Press*, 2014



**To Know Them is to Teach Them**

*I Can Really Learn from You: Boys as Relational Learners*, by Michael Reichert and Richard Hawley

"Some boys thrive in school; many do not," write Reichert and Hawley at the start of *I Can Learn from You*. In their investigation of this troubling fact, the authors focus primarily on the quality of boys' relationships with their teachers – and how these relationships contribute to their success or failure in school. When teachers are able to connect on a personal level, the authors say, boys are much more likely to engage and succeed in school. Fail to do so and boys are quick to disengage. Beyond identifying the student-teacher relationship as the key to boys' success in school, the great value of this book is that Reichert and Hawley show teachers how they can help boys form productive learning relationships – and how schools can, and should, support teachers in this essential work. Among other things, beyond teaching their subject, teachers can help boys by understanding their individual needs; supporting their interests and talents; being willing to accommodate some level of opposition; and revealing a degree of personal vulnerability. This transformation in a school's approach to teaching, the authors say, "will occur only when school leaders embrace the conviction that relationship does not merely enhance scholastic experience; it is the very medium through which students' engagement, effort, and ultimate mastery are realized."

Michael Brosnan, *Independent School Magazine*, DC

*Harvard Education Publishing Group*, March 11, 2014

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