

OF NOTE

Building Learning by Learning About Buildings

Blueprint for Tomorrow: Redesigning Schools for Student-Centered Learning, by Prakash Nair

Prakash Nair, founding president of Fielding Nair International, has devoted much of his professional career to thinking about school planning and design. In his latest book, he frames a cogent and convincing argument that school buildings are among the obstacles to making changes in the way we teach and learn. Given the "cells and bells" design of current buildings, educators face an uphill journey in changing pedagogy and curriculum. Nair outlines four design principles (be welcoming, be versatile, support varying and specific learning activities, and send positive messages) that support six educational strategies (student-centered learning, teacher collaboration, positive school climate, technology integration, flexible scheduling, and connection to the environment, community, and a global network). In addition to his vision for a future of school buildings with transparent, flexible spaces, Nair provides economical "do now" solutions and "smart ideas" to help educators transform their existing facilities to incorporate his suggested design principles and educational strategies. The book includes before and after pictures and stories of real, incremental change. Readers of this book will look at their facilities with new eyes and a desire to make changes now for the benefit of teaching and learning.

Shelby Hammer, River Oaks Baptist School, TX

Harvard Education Press, 2014

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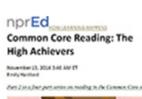
A New MOOC with Eric Foner

Civil War and Reconstruction MOOC

About three years ago MOOCs looked as if they were struggling mightily, but they now seem to be on the upswing, following Christensen's arc of disruptive innovation. Eric Foner, a Pulitzer Prize winner and one of Columbia University's renowned professors, has produced a three-part MOOC on the Civil War that is well worth your attention. The course, which is spread out over 27 weeks and available for free on edX, serves as a prime articulation of the work of The Columbia Center for New Media Teaching and Learning, which aims to promote innovation in pedagogy and curriculum for teachers and higher education. The Civil War series examines the causes of the war, the route to secession, the Civil War itself and the challenges of the emancipation of four million slaves. Foner, who is soon to retire from teaching, wants to preserve his courses and ensure access to all. As such, materials and assessments, in addition to certificates of completion for those who earn them, are all free of charge. For advanced students, the series may offer a rich resource for blended learning. For educators who have given up on MOOCs, or who remain curious yet skeptical about their potential, it is an excellent place to begin a thorough reassessment.

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center, NY

EdX course, 2014



Common Reading, Done Better

Common Core Reading: The High Achievers, by Emily Hanford

In this latest installment of an NPR series, reporter Emily Hanford explores the impact of the Common Core reading standards on students at the high performing Reno High School in Nevada. The close reading skills stressed in the Common Core are a welcome move away from the summarizing that many prior lessons asked of students. Now, students are expected to cite evidence from the text. Of interest is the fact that lower achieving students have demonstrated higher levels of engagement, while traditionally high achievers have been more frustrated with the new standards because they cannot finish the assignments quickly. Ultimately though, all students have found the work more interesting and challenging. Close reading skills have long been part of independent school classrooms and it is particularly heartening to see them connected to increased engagement. As one student noted, "It feels like the point is to actually learn something.... You have to use your brain and you have to struggle a little bit to figure it out. Once you do, you've actually gained something from it." For skeptics of the Common Core, the NPR series shows how the skills being stressed are increasing student participation; supporters, meanwhile, will be pleased by the way students and teachers are finding newfound pleasure in their teaching and learning.

Eric Temple, Lick-Wilmerding High School, CA

NPR.org blog, November 13, 2014



A Little Bit Like a Nuisance

A veteran teacher turned coach shadows 2 students for 2 days - a sobering lesson learned, by Grant Wiggins

[Editor's Note: Though widely circulated, this blog post reflects a longstanding Klingenstein recommendation: to truly understand school from a student perspective, every teacher should spend one day a year shadowing a student at his/her own school or a neighboring school.]

After shadowing a small group of high school students for a few days, a teacher coach offers three major insights on the experience: students spend most of their time sitting, and this is inherently devaluing; while sitting, they are also mostly silent, passively taking in information; and to reinforce the silence, teachers repeatedly tell students to "be quiet and pay attention." Each of these revelations informs heartfelt resolutions for classroom reform. Students should have opportunities to move around in class, even if this movement comes at the cost of sacrificing content coverage. Teachers should rigorously limit how much they talk - the author suggests using an egg timer - and create opportunities for student-centered inquiry and discussion. Sarcasm should be eliminated and replaced with empathetic patience. The entire shadowing exercise is a reminder that the teacher experience of the classroom - in front of the room, moving around, talking most of the time, working through his or her own lesson plan - is substantially different from the student experience of being seated, quiet, anxious and often made to feel "a little bit like a nuisance all day long." Certainly these are not the foundations for the kind of deep and meaningful learning we hope to inspire in our students.

Eric V. Chandler, Kent Denver School, CO

Granted, and... - thoughts on education by Grant Wiggins, October 10, 2014



The Rage of Sexting

Why Kids Sext, by Hanna Rosin

When a mother discovered pictures of her naked 15-year-old daughter on Instagram (along with other girls from her daughter's school), she was outraged. She tried - unsuccessfully - to work with Instagram and then called the police and the school. Instead of being devastated, many of the girls were defiant: "This is my life and my body and I can do whatever I want with it," said one. Processing and sending a picture of a nude minor is a felony most everywhere, but the students were blasé. Most had been asked to send a nude picture, but few felt really pressured. In most instances, nothing came of the explicit photo being texted: it wasn't forwarded and no one got hurt. Sexting, writes Hanna Rosin, doesn't lead to sex; "it is a form of sexual activity." Surveys have shown that about 30% of teens nationwide have done it, and that means it is no longer rare. Still, school leaders struggle to figure out how to deal with a phenomenon that can disrupt social relationships at school and force police involvement. This article is comprehensive in its discussion of the issues that administrators (and parents) will face when such incidents happen. It can help frame a response to something that is both prevalent and confounding.

Bruce Shaw, Bruce A. Shaw Consulting, MA

The Atlantic, November, 2014

BOOKS



Solving for N

How Not to be Wrong: The Power of Mathematical Thinking, by Jordan Ellenberg

The teaching of mathematics in schools is usually relegated to either the development of students' conceptual understanding of math or the building of students' computational competence. Some schools strive for both outcomes, teaching students *how* to solve for x and *why* they are doing so. Jordan Ellenberg's book takes the latter ambition a step further by demonstrating how mathematical thinking helps sharpen our "real-world" thinking. Looking at polling information, medical studies, personal finance and sports statistics, Professor Ellenberg applies mathematical theory to many of the data sets that are presented to us as public and private citizens. His prose is engaging and humorous and the many illustrations he includes help strengthen his readers' understanding. In many ways, *How Not to be Wrong* reads like a more erudite version of *Freakanomics*, providing adult learners with many "ah-ha" moments, math teachers with an interesting examination of how their teaching might be expanded or altered and younger readers with a fuller view of mathematics. More than mere abstraction, math is a way of applying cogent thinking to our lives.

Christopher Lauricella, The Park School of Buffalo, NY

Penguin Press HC, 2014



Are We Living Less Fully?

What About Me? The Struggle for Identity in a Market-Based Society, by Paul Verhaeghe

Critics will find parts of this book polemical, but Verhaeghe points to some of the most important questions of our time, often directly addressing the education sector, where we develop our earliest ideas about success. He explores the mass culture's narrow view of success, one that is generally both material and corporate, challenging how we equate success with wellness and failure with disease. He examines the mass medication of children and adults for newfound "disorders," worrying about our "depressive pleasure-seeking on credit," the ongoing myth of meritocracy and its partner myth of perfectibility. In surprising, graceful leaps, Verhaeghe journeys through hundreds of years of western ethics, linking education, sociology, psychology, anthropology, religion and economics. If this sounds ambitious for a 250-page book, it is. Verhaeghe's logic may be sweeping, but it is hard to dismiss or ignore. He is interested in how we learn who we are, what we ask of ourselves and our society and the ways in which we are coming up short or at least living less fully than we otherwise could. This book offers a compelling and deeply thought-provoking theory about the most striking identifiers of our age, our culture and us.

Meghan Tally, American School in London

Scribe Publications, 2014



Those Awkward Years are Also Vital

Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence, by Laurence Steinberg

Dr. Laurence Steinberg, a world-renowned adolescent researcher, has crafted a must-read book for middle and high school educators. In it he elegantly synthesizes the last fifteen years of behavioral, social and neuroscientific research on adolescence. One of Steinberg's signature phrases about adolescence is that it "begins in biology (puberty), but ends in culture (marriage/full-time employment)." Indeed, he defines the current window of adolescence as starting as early as age 10 and ending as late as 25, and much of the book examines the current cultural phenomenon of "extended adolescence." At the core of Steinberg's book is the breathtaking degree of brain plasticity and brain development that occurs during the adolescent years; with that in mind, he argues that the primary goal for every adolescent should be the development of a central cognitive capacity: *self-regulation*. In fact, he writes, "the capacity for self-regulation is probably the most important contributor to achievement, mental health and social success." In the highly readable last chapter "Brains on Trial," Steinberg outlines the difference between what he calls "hot cognition" and "cold cognition," and offers fascinating insights on the degree to which we should hold adolescents responsible for their actions.

John A. Lewis, IV, The Gunston School, MD

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014



Our Very Own Kerouac

#EdJourney: A Roadmap to the Future of Education, by Grant Lichtman

Many educators know about Grant Lichtman's recent road trip. He visited 64 public and private schools in 89 days, talking deeply with hundreds of teachers, administrators and parents. Lichtman's jaunt in itself is instructive. It provokes us to journey out of our own schools and to look beyond our own traditions, to ask more questions and to share more of what's interesting about our local practices. But his story transcends its picaresque mechanics. Like the proverbial Zen master, Lichtman specializes in the hard sip to the back of the head - helping us quickly see what we have always sensed to be true. Talk about risk taking and failure, so popular in the modern press, is not compatible with the way most schools actually operate; having a 1:1 or iPad program should not be mistaken for true innovation in a school; bold use of time in schools will allow students to use at least part of their classroom time to pursue their passions; old school management practices won't help us create new school learning environments. Though parts of this book rehash popular critiques of schooling, Lichtman celebrates what we do well, reminds us that we can always do better and shines a light on the road forward.

Stephen J. Valentine, Montclair Kimberley Academy, NJ

Jossey-Bass, 2014

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