

OF NOTE

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EDITORIAL BOARD

Not What We Thought

Brainstorm; The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain, by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D.

In his most recent *NY Times Bestseller*, Daniel J. Siegel takes the commonly held negative perception of adolescence and turns it upside down. From the start, he works to dispel the myth that the ups and downs of adolescence derive from raging hormones, while pushing back on the notion that this stage of life must simply be survived. On the contrary, he proposes that by framing adolescence differently, we might see it as a time of great thriving. With strong insights based on brain research, Siegel carefully addresses the four familiar parts of adolescence: novelty seeking, social engagement, increasing emotional intensity, and creative exploration. Although the book has a strong science element, the author does a good job of making the neuroscience understandable for and applicable to the reader. The beauty of Siegel's latest book is that it takes a subject that is widely relevant, and often considered understood, and gives us brand new ways to think of and approach it. Simultaneously academic and practical, this book is recommended to anyone who cares for and/or works with adolescents.

Teresa Robson, John Cooper School, The Woodlands, TX

Penguin, 2013

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ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



The Academic Life of a Five-Year-Old

Is Kindergarten the New First Grade? The Changing Nature of Kindergarten in the Age of Accountability, by Daphna Bassok and Anna Korem

This AERA -funded study of the shifting emphasis on academic curriculum in the classrooms of kindergarten children shows educators what has changed. The report also informs, from an open-minded perspective, the discussion of the value of a heightened academic focus for young children. The clarity and accessibility of Bassok and Korem's research draws a straightforward picture of marked change. We learn that when kindergarten teachers were asked in 1998, 31% believed that children should learn to read in kindergarten. In 2006, 65% of teachers agreed. In the same time period, exposure to science, music, art, and physical education dropped significantly for kindergartners. Mathematics teaching included an increase in the time spent on skills that were previously deemed too advanced for kindergarten. This study addresses the "academization" of kindergarten with findings that advanced academic content can improve learning trajectories, and has uniquely strong long-term impacts. The authors leave as an open question for discussion and further research whether a focus on academics needs to be at odds with play. At any rate, this is a careful study, and a salient one for early childhood classrooms and those with interest in what benefits, if any, kindergarten as "the new first grade" has for children.

Elizabeth Morley, Principal
Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study Laboratory School
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Ed Policy Works, University of Virginia, January 2014



Stacking Up Student Work

Doug Lemov's Field Notes

Doug Lemov, author of *Teach Like a Champion*, writes a lively blog, and this particular post about the "stack audit" is a compelling, straightforward, and practical example of ways that teachers and administrators can collect authentic data to study various teaching practices in their schools. Lemov describes a technique called "the stack audit" that he has used for various purposes in his school. During this process, he might collect, for example, all homework turned in over two days. Next, a group of teachers and he would take an hour collectively to read through the student work to see what they discover about student achievement, attitudes toward homework, teacher expectations, and the like. The stack audit is a technique that seems highly adaptable for many kinds of group research, and it keeps the discussion firmly rooted in what is actually happening at school rather than wishful or anecdotal thinking. Lemov is a master of suggesting small tweaks in teachers' behavior that can yield big results in the classroom; the stack audit is one such example. It is a small research tool for teacher teams and administrators that could yield interesting and authentic data about many aspects of school practice.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM

Doug Lemov's Field Notes, January 19, 2014 (blog)



Math Problems, Math Solutions

Harkness Math, by Karen Geary and Sami Atif

At a time when many schools are reconsidering their math curricula, prompted by the recognition that their students have begun to understand mathematics not as an enterprise of thinking but of memorizing and applying procedures, Karen Geary and Sami Atif's explanation of an alternative is particularly pertinent. In their article, the two teachers from Phillips Exeter Academy provide a primer on how their math department employs the Harkness pedagogy in its courses. Geary and Atif provide a thorough account of how problem sets replace traditional textbooks, how the homework assignments prepare students for rich class discussions, and how the teacher's role in such a course is profoundly altered: "Should we be delivering content at all? Perhaps teaching can be more about creating an environment that fostered the discovery of content." Most convincingly, they describe the sense of mathematical authority in students made possible when they are charged with a higher level of engagement with, and responsibility for, mathematical ideas. While acknowledging that shifting people's conception of what math education can look like is a challenge - "Math involves procedures and formulas, calculation, logic and correct answer. What is there to discuss?" - the pair nonetheless provides a compelling alternative model.

Amy Hand, Trinity School, NY

Independent Teacher, Fall 2013



Framing the Unfortunate State of Education in America

Why Other Countries Teach Better Science Education In The U.S. Is Mediocre. Here's What We Can Do To Fix It

These two pieces thunder the deep concern that American schools are short-changing students, including the brightest of them, and that this is especially happening in the deeply important STEM subjects. America's dismal PISA scores prompted the concern. More important, the two articles represent only a fraction of the writing that has been done since the PISA results were released. The sheer amount of commentary signifies the desperation felt by many thought leaders, and the worry expands well beyond standardized testing: they examine the poor quality of teacher training in America, as well as the lack of science- and math-trained teachers; the paucity of advanced STEM courses and the small number of students taking them; persistent and growing inequalities in who has access to the best teachers and the strongest curricula; and the inability of teachers to engage, challenge, and inspire students. There is, of course, controversy about PISA specifically and standardized testing in general. The problem, however - even for our best schools - is that American students as a whole are slipping and there doesn't seem to be the political will even to address the issues that have the potential to impact our future economy and our way of life. These articles cry out for change.

Bruce Shaw, Bruce A Shaw Consulting, MA

Newyorktimes.com
Cognosceii.wbur.org



American Dunces?

So, the U.S. is Terrible at International Tests: Who Cares? by Jordan Weissmann Casciaro

In this short, provocatively titled article, Jordan Weissman takes an unorthodox look at both recent and longstanding instances of poor American scores on international educational tests, and in doing so, shows the worth of individual creativity and of cultural and psychological factors not easily measured on tests. In framing this complicated debate, Weissmann begins with Hanushek's assertions that test scores accurately predict future economic growth and that the comparative advantages that have allowed the U.S. economy to "outperform" its test results are expiring as other countries emulate our institutions and our practices. In response to this assertion, Weissman debunks the assumption that high test scores will automatically generate an effective workforce and refers to research about "high-testing, low ability adults who cannot thrive professionally" in China. Supporting the idea that there are more factors to consider than simply scores, Weissmann celebrates the power of individual instances of creativity and notes the astonishing economic growth of Israel, another middle range test-taker, as well as the longstanding economic stagnation of Japan, a stellar test-taking nation. While not celebrating low scores, Weissmann adds richness and depth to the debate and gives hope to "American dunces."

Aaron Schubach, Fountain Valley School of Colorado, CO

The Atlantic, Dec 3, 2013



The Many Layers of Access

The Challenge of Being Poor at America's Richest Colleges, by Maggie McGrath

Senior KellyNoel Waldorf's guest column in Duke University's student newspaper recently went viral, sparking McGrath's article on addressing socioeconomic status in "America's richest colleges." Many independent schools face similar issues of equity and access due to high tuition and limited financial aid budgets. McGrath addresses the "soft skills" that low-income students need to learn once they are attending elite universities, and how they need to feel entitled to all the resources provided and seek them out. For their part, schools must be proactive in advertising these resources, creating a culture where students feel comfortable asking for help when they need it. Students should not be expected to hide aspects of their identity, but instead they should be encouraged to speak openly about socioeconomic issues. McGrath's article addresses one of the most challenging diversity issues schools currently face, and highlights schools' responsibility for creating cultures of comfort and awareness for every student to feel entitled to the full experience.

Jeannie Rumsey, The Madeira School, VA

Forbes.com 11/27/13

BOOKS



You Can't Live Without Them

Understanding Independent School Parents. The Teacher's Guide to Successful Family-School Relationships, by Michael G. Thompson and Alison Fox Mazzola

Inspired by the authors' guide to successful family-school relationships published by NAIS, this short book addresses "one of the most vexing and perplexing aspects" of a career in independent schools. Thompson, a school psychologist, and Mazzola, an experienced teacher, wrote this guide to help new and seasoned teachers build better and stronger bridges with today's independent school parents, whose high expectations of both their children and their children's schools do not seem to be dampening. This guide offers insightful information on how to better understand family differences, and how to create a school environment that fosters effective relationships with parents to keep children's interests first. It also offers tips on how to have more effective parent-teacher conferences, and specific pointers on how to manage both reasonable and difficult parents. It's chapter on the latter ("the 5 percent" parents) is particularly empowering for teachers, giving them strategies to protect their time, as well as their emotional reserves, when dealing with parents who are incapable of behaving properly. Administrators and educators will find this guide indispensable as they seek to balance the "joy [they] originally found in teaching" with the kinds of partnerships with parents that are no longer avoidable.

Carlos San Juan Garc a, Dalton School, NY

Wise Teacher Press, 2012



Design for the Greater Good

World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students, by Dr. Yong Zhao

In his latest book, Dr. Yong Zhao argues clearly and forcefully against the global testing regime and the "employment-oriented paradigm." Zhao favors pedagogy more in line with that imagined by John Dewey, leaning on examples like High Tech High and his experiences in the Chinese education system. Creativity and entrepreneurial mindsets are traits necessary for individual success and economic growth in the 21st century. With greater student autonomy and freedom, Zhao posits, creative entrepreneurship with a global perspective becomes possible. Entrepreneurial students might exceed the needs of others and design products or projects that will meet those needs, serving their fellow humans through creativity and learning. Zhao's vision is being realized in open source design through Fab Labs the world over; through a comprehensive, provocative list of principles and indicators, his book provides guidelines for fostering similar entrepreneurial ideas and aspiration in our schools. Independent and international schools need not cling to old learning or submit to the crisis mentality undermining public schools throughout America. A new paradigm is possible. In an interconnected world, service to others through creative entrepreneurship offers a powerful platform for meaningful teaching and learning.

Ian Hoke, Zurich International School, Zurich, Switzerland

Corwin, 2012

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