

OF NOTE

[Quitters Sometimes Win](#)

Mastering the Art of Quitting, by Peg Streep and Alan Bernstein

Independent schools, with our penchant for adding programs and initiatives, will want to consider the argument presented in Peg Streep and Alan Bernstein's book, *Mastering the Art of Quitting: Why it Matters in Life, Love, and Work*. We have a hard time quitting anything, they assert, because thoughts about the abandoned goal persist. Therefore, two practices aid the art of quitting: disengaging from your current goal and redirecting your energy towards a new goal. Streep and Bernstein present a compelling case that knowing when and how to quit is as important as persistence, and they explore the psychology of quitting - both what makes it so difficult and how to quit well. Quitting well builds on the skills needed for goal setting and program evaluation; understanding why something is not working can lead to a better approach. As independent schools establish innovative programs, we need to build a parallel capacity to be able to recognize not only when to persist, but also when (and how) to artfully quit a flawed initiative. School leaders who can cultivate in themselves the discipline to quit well can help their schools learn to quit, too - shifting precious time, treasure, and talent into goals that best serve our varied and vital missions.

Sara Kelley-Mudie, Hawken School, OH

Da Capo Press, 2014

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ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



[Words Count, not Word Count](#)

Quality of Words, Not Quantity, Is Crucial to Language Skills, Study Finds, by Douglas Quenqua

In 1995 researchers Hart and Risley assessed the ways in which daily exchanges between a parent and child shape language and vocabulary development. Their groundbreaking findings showed dramatic disparities between the number of words children were exposed to in high income families and in families on welfare. Children from affluent homes were exposed to 30 million more words than children on welfare. Researchers found that 86% to 98% of the words used by each child by the age of three were derived from their parents' vocabularies. Follow up studies showed that the impact of vocabulary acquisition had lasting effects on school performance. Now, twenty years later, new research shows that the quality of communication is of greater importance than the quantity of words a child hears. A White House conference on "bridging the word gap" showed that vocabulary is enhanced by parents' personal interactions with their children. For example, building conversations around shared symbols and rituals is more important than just "cashing in" words, according to Professor Kathryn Hirsh-Pasek. Schools with early learning programs may find ways to reinforce curriculum that builds on these informative studies. The findings may also be useful to schools seeking meaningful service learning projects in their communities.

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center, NY

The New York Times, October 2014



[Grading the Way We Grade Boys](#)

Why Girls Tend to Get Better Grades Than Boys Do, by Enrico Gnautati

In this concise, thoughtful article, Enrico Gnautati tackles some of the contentious questions around how boys and girls perform in school. Looking at recent research out of the University of New Brunswick, Gnautati considers traits such as self-regulation, self-discipline, and conscientiousness, summarizing how girls tend to be mastery-oriented while boys tend to be performance-oriented. Provocatively, the article asks why homework and organization count for so much in our classrooms and whether we should separate "life skills" and "knowledge." Gnautati invokes classroom behaviors along gender lines relative, in particular, to teacher assessment practices - ultimately wondering if we should count homework if it appears to disadvantage boys to do so. Because girls tend to plan ahead and be more intrinsically satisfied by setting and meeting goals, he says, schools are favoring their growth. Whatever we do or don't change, Gnautati advocates for talking more openly about gender trends in schools. (Many independent schools participated this fall in the Independent School Gender Project, whose results will no doubt shed some light on current attitudes and perceptions in our student and faculty populations.) At a time when ongoing pay gaps in the workplace coincide with more young women than men attending college, educators will want to keep an eye on the trends cited by Gnautati and revisit our implicit and explicit messages to students about what learning is and can be, whoever they are.

Meghan Tally, American School in London

The Atlantic Monthly, September 18, 2014



[Measuring the Idea of Measuring What Matters](#)

Implications for the Social Sector

Speakers: Lisbeth Schorr, Senior Fellow, Center for the Study of Social Policy
Fay Twersky, Director, Effective Philanthropy Group
Alicia Grunow, Senior Managing Partner, Carnegie Foundation

In this provocative podcast from the Stanford Graduate School of Business's Center for Social Innovation, a trio of experts shares the challenges of using data to drive policy and improvement. Independent schools embracing the importance of using data to inform decisions can learn from these practitioners. They helpfully discuss the important role of what has become known as improvement science - both its effective use and the challenge of trying to use data to assess social innovation. If we are invested in using data to drive improvement, three important questions need to be asked: What are we trying to accomplish, what changes are needed to improve, and how will we know if the changes worked? Ms. Grunow reminds us that, "All improvement requires change, but not all change leads to improvement." Additionally, Ms. Schorr pushes us to think about accepting more risk while collecting data since "trading off certainty for great knowledge," can help organizations meet their mission. She also reminds us that, "Transformational programs are often the least measurable, and that we can't measure what changes lives because the variables are too complicated to assess with random assignment methods." Though a bit dense in parts, this conversation, anchored in the ideas of three very thoughtful experts, helps us to contextualize how we might use data in our own schools.

Eric Temple, Lick-Wilmerding High School, CA

Stanford Graduate School of Business, July 9, 2014



[Learning to Be Human](#)

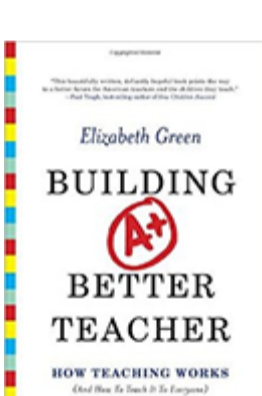
Video: Woodie Flowers TEDxPiscataquaRiver Talk: *Liberal education for the 21st century*

MIT professor emeritus Woodie Flowers separates the Ted Talk wheat from the chaff in this exploration of the future of education. He begins by framing the difference between "training" and "education" and worrying that we have conflated the two. For example, "learning calculus," explains Flowers, "is *training*. . . Learning to think using the concepts of calculus is *education*." For Professor Flowers this distinction has developed over his forty years as a mechanical engineering professor, during which time he has observed that his most academically successful students were increasingly unable to negotiate basic mechanical problems, such as connecting a simple circuit. As students have been increasingly trained rather than educated, they have lost their grounding in the practical application of their training. Fitting his engineering bent, Professor Flowers suggests that the future of education lies in teaching students, "those things that machines cannot do." He believes that machines will be able to do a lot, including training, but will never be able to offer the type of education students will need to negotiate the 21st Century. Professor Flowers sketches a future of education that coincides with the continuing aspirations of many independent schools: connecting small classes of students with teachers who are experts in their field and providing a liberal arts education that focuses on teaching "that which is uniquely human."

Christopher Lauricella, The Park School of Buffalo, NY

TEDxPiscataquaRiver Talk

BOOKS



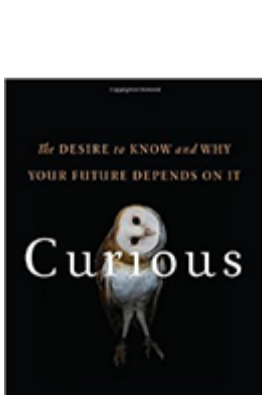
[Autonomy and Inconsistency](#)

Building a Better Teacher: How Teaching Works (and How to Teach It to Everyone) by Elizabeth Green

In the midst of national initiatives to standardize assessment and curriculum, Elizabeth Green argues that improving the practice of teaching in American schools has been largely neglected. She notes that any debate over teaching has focused on either greater accountability or greater autonomy, but neither side provides guidance to teachers on how to improve student learning or resolve the inconsistency that we see in teacher effectiveness. Through a series of character-driven accounts, Green chronicles the decentralized efforts to improve teaching in America from university-run lab schools to Doug Lemov's taxonomy. She naturally comes to the conclusion that the way forward for American education lies in the middle; the data-driven, systematic approach of the charter school entrepreneurs should be combined with the depth of inquiry advocated by leading education professors and demonstrated by Japanese lesson study. Though Green does not quite deliver on the roadmap to designing and scaling such a national system, her book offers an absorbing narrative of previous efforts to improve teaching, along with the pros and cons of those initiatives. Green's scope is the American public education system, but independent schools should take note; we face the same issues of autonomy leading to inconsistency and can learn a great deal from the various efforts depicted by Green to help teachers hone their craft.

Michael Arjona, The Walker School, GA

W.W. Norton & Company, 2014

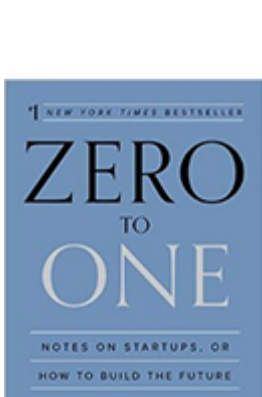


[Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends on It](#)

What happens if curiosity dies? Ian Leslie's new book *Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends on It* makes a documented case for not only the irreplaceable value of curiosity, but also its vulnerability to benign neglect. Instinctual diverse curiosity, so alive in our youngest students, is prized but is not the target subject here. Leslie sees epistemic curiosity - the entrained drive to go deeper, to navigate complexity - and empathetic curiosity - the trait that powers understanding the thoughts and feelings of others - as more necessary in a mature, inquiring mind. Both forms of curiosity, the author argues, can be nourished or starved by the choices we make in education, in families, and in the workplace. But the book departs from the predictable when it leverages data, opinion, and persuasion to present the best ways to nourish curiosity. The recommended diet is not the student-driven, inquiry-based classroom; on the contrary, curious people require large stores of direct, knowledge-rich teaching and learning to fuel their inquiring minds. A book that praises the art of questioning leaves the reader with plenty of reliable starting points and many questions about how curiosity is best supported in parenting and schooling . . . as it should.

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

House of Anansi Press, 2014



[Startup 101](#)

Zero to One: Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future, by Peter Thiel and Blake Masters

Peter Thiel is famous for founding Paypal, but he should be on the radars of educators because of his Thiel Fellowship, which pays students to quit college and pursue their passions. He continues to rile formal education, albeit less directly, in his recent book, written with Blake Masters. In a slim volume, peppered with both warm insights and tepid generalizations, Thiel and Masters provide accessible guidance for entrepreneurs, current or hopeful. More important for school leaders is the quick tour through how innovation happens in the startup sector. Additionally, Thiel and Masters' advice about finding one's niche will ring as true for schools as it does for companies: "All happy companies [earn] a monopoly by solving a unique problem. All failed companies are the same: they failed to escape competition." The layer of the book that is most powerful for educators, though, is its challenge to how we think about the system of school and the ways in which it prepares students to succeed in the outside world. Does every student need to be an expert in (or even exposed to) the same subjects? What happens when young people focus only on things about which they are passionate, while having space to discover new passions? Most striking is the degree of difference between the interactions described in this book and the structures of our schools, many of which trade on a self-conception of bold innovation and authenticity.

Reshan Richards, Montclair Kimberley Academy, NJ

Stephen J. Valentine, Montclair Kimberley Academy, NJ

Crown Business, 2014

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