

## Hiding in Plain Sight

*Educated in Whiteness: Good Intentions and Diversity in Schools*, by Angelina E. Castagno

In *Educated in Whiteness: Good Intentions and Diversity in Schools*, Angelina Castagno is unapologetically critical of almost every aspect of our common approaches to diversity work. Examining unexamined practices under a spotlight of critical pedagogy, she reports her findings on the question of why schools repeatedly - and often blindly - fail in attempts to right wrongs. She cites white privilege and entrenched unwillingness as responsible for pervasive erosion of better intentions. Additionally, she is clear that outcomes will not improve while our schools overlook the fact that "nice and well-meaning" behaviors create unyielding barriers, often based in white privilege. This book is not intended to be a comfortable read. Castagno uses critical race and whiteness theories of education to examine obstacles to seeing privilege; she also exposes privilege deeply, decisively and in current contexts. While the classroom stories are set in two quite different public high schools, Castagno's ethnographic research will resonate with anyone living in schools and seeing inequities that are not yet solved, despite good intentions. As for specific solutions, Castagno's are not lacking, exactly; instead, they are presented as emergent. Solutions need to come from within educators and their schools, and both must set out to seek change.

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

University of Minnesota Press, April 2014

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## ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



## Does Grit Lack Resilience?

*Should Schools Teach Personality?* by Anna North

Psychology professor Angela Duckworth first popularized grit as a key personality trait in academic success. She defined it as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Since then, researchers have reached consensus that noncognitive traits - such as grit - may be more important to academic success than innate intelligence. In a study just released, Australian psychology professor Arthur E. Poropat found that the characteristic of grit (he calls it conscientiousness) combined with openness (qualities like creativity and curiosity) is more highly correlated with academic performance than intelligence. From established independent schools to charter schools that are part of the KIPP network, there is widespread acceptance of this research and teaching these noncognitive traits has become part of the curriculum in many schools. Educators embrace these findings because they believe that noncognitive traits matter and that they can be taught. But thoughtful critics are raising concerns that warrant careful attention. There are times, warns education critic Alfie Kohn in his new book, *The Myth Of The Spoiled Child*, when changing direction, rather than maintaining dogged persistence, may be a wiser option for a student. And putting the onus of responsibility on student personality without considering the school context can overlook needed structural changes in the school. Other thoughtful scholars have argued that teaching grit outside of a moral context can lead to self-centeredness. Schools that have implemented programs aimed at teaching noncognitive factors may want to assess the outcomes in light of concerns that are being raised.

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center, NY

New York Times, January 10, 2015



## Still Hiding in Plain Sight

*Racial Bias, Even When We Have Good Intentions*, by Sendhil Mullainathan

As schools look to foster productive dialogue about race in the wake of shootings and demonstrations, most recently in Ferguson, MO and Staten Island, NY, school leaders may look for ways to talk with their communities about the insidious and often unconscious ways that racism continues to permeate our culture. In this brief and highly readable article, Sendhil Mullainathan summarizes an impressive body of empirical research that has isolated the effect of race from other factors in arenas ranging from housing to Ebay auctions to the kinds of recommendations for care among heart patients. The breadth of these studies is quite stunning, and they reveal very clearly that people of color are systematically disadvantaged in many of the most important paths to economic and cultural well-being. The article also articulates a very important truth: even when institutions consider race favorably, as in some elite college admissions, a "helping hand in one arena does not preclude harmful shoves in many other areas, including ignored resumes, unhelpful faculty members and reluctant landlords." Mullainathan also connects this empirical bias to Daniel Kahneman's concept of "thinking fast and slow," showing us that our fast thinking, those snap judgments, can reveal unconscious bias with profound effects. Teachers looking to avoid discussions of race based on anecdote will find Mullainathan's summary of research clear, helpful, and enlightening.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM

New York Times, January 3, 2015



## Existential Annotations

*A Weapon for Readers*, by Tim Parks

In the *New York Review of Books*, Tim Parks gives us this beautiful provocation to read with a pen in hand, which is to say, actively, critically, and imaginatively. If this essay most immediately grabs the attention of language arts teachers, hopefully it will also soon compel readers and thinkers of all kinds. As Parks ponders the act of reading, he considers the shift from being "passive consumers of a monologue" to "active participants in a dialogue" and the ways in which texts become "more dense, more interesting" when we greet them with real curiosity and questions, even lively skepticism. Parks reveals active reading as "a vehicle for self knowledge," asking, "for what is the self if not the position one habitually assumes in relation to other selves?" Parks advocates for active reading, pen in hand, but really, he is talking about a way of being in the world - perpetually learning, critically thinking with a growth mindset, and endlessly willing to test and fail or test and revise. In beautiful prose, Parks explores some of the biggest challenges of our time, including how our enchantment with all sorts of writing leads us to fail to question it or enter into a dialogue with it. "Sometimes it seems the whole of society languishes in the stupor of the fictions it has swallowed," Parks writes. Educators will find inspiration here.

Meghan Tally, American School in London, England

New York Review of Books, December 3, 2014



## Opening Our Minds While Opening Our Doors

*Inside a Chinese Test-Prep Factory*, by Brook Larmer  
*What Students in China Have Taught Me About U.S. College Admissions*, by Terry Crawford

It is estimated that some 250,000 Chinese high school students will opt to study in the United States this year with many of these students enrolled in independent schools. As these international students integrate into our school communities, it is important to understand their motivation for leaving China, their drive to be admitted to a prestigious university and the lengths they will go to make such admission a reality. These two articles will help the reader understand some of the cultural forces that are at work on these students. The *Times Magazine* article provides insight into how China's national college-entrance exam, the gaokao, shapes the lives of Chinese students and their families. The *Atlantic* article furthers this examination by comparing and contrasting the college admissions process in China and the United States. Additionally, it ruminates on the "soft power" that American universities have at their disposal and how such power could potentially reshape the way Chinese students (and their families) approach the college admissions process. The two pieces should also help the reader reflect on the strengths and liabilities of an educational system built on high-stakes testing.

Christopher Lauricella, The Park School of Buffalo, NY

The New York Times, December 31, 2014  
The Atlantic, January 6, 2015



## And Still Hiding in Plain Sight

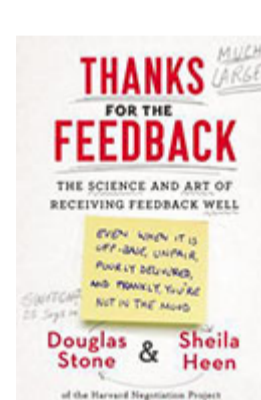
*Thoughts on Race in America, as a Backdrop to Ferguson*, by Nicholas Kristof

Over the past months, seething events have raised tensions that are now symbolized by the simple phrase: *Black Lives Matter*. The massacre of school children in Pakistan and the kidnappings in Nigeria unveiled unutterable horror. And now, after the most recent killings at Charlie Hebdo and a kosher food store in Paris, the question of the school's role in teaching students how to negotiate the complexities of a pluralistic but fractured world seems paramount. Nicholas Kristof's five-part series "When Whites Don't Get It," collected online with supplemental material, is not only thoughtful, but also helpful in framing classroom or community discussions while providing data. Kristof explores white attitudes about Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, MO and then examines the data that tell the stories of black lives in America. The hyperlinked format of these pieces allows for a depth of study, as Kristof provides live links to many of the reports that he mentions. Additionally, he usefully characterizes the evolving reader response to the series as a way to more broadly classify the power and danger of narratives: "[Humans] have an incredible ability to self-select facts that will fit their narrative." While these articles are full of opinion, they are also full of information that can shape the kind of debate that matters, one that is bound to create discomfort but will, in the end, educate our students to take their places in a civil society.

Bruce Shaw, Bruce A Shaw Consulting, Essex, MA

New York Times, November 25, 2014

## BOOKS



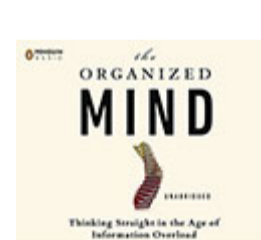
## Feedback, Triggers, You

*Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well*, by Douglas Stone & Sheila Heen

The feedback on feedback is clear. People aren't great at receiving it or giving it. They might say they welcome feedback, only to dismiss it as inaccurate, unfair, or unhelpful. Stone and Heen tackle these all-too-familiar issues by focusing on the art of receiving feedback with openness and curiosity. Fans of their earlier book *Difficult Conversations* will find some familiar discussions here, but every reader will leave with a sharper understanding of the dynamics and pitfalls of feedback conversations, which are essential for personal growth. The authors identify three types of feedback "triggers" that can provoke strong, often adverse reactions in us: truth triggers (the validity of the feedback itself), relationship triggers (our perception of feedback givers and their credibility) and identity triggers (the impact of feedback on our self-conception). The book includes helpful, practical strategies (e.g., try to hear the coaching in feedback, rather than the judgment) and instructive stories that illustrate each concept. Receiving feedback well requires us to reflect on our sensitivities, our vulnerabilities and our personal challenges in truly hearing and responding to others' views.

Joy Hurd, The Buckley School, NY

Viking Penguin, 2014



## Offload to Daydream

*The Organized Mind*, by Daniel Levitin

We spend working memory capacity and energy holding onto information in our brains, causing us to make mistakes or have trouble discerning what's important. Multitasking, a mere myth, uses up valuable energy, too. In his new book, *The Organized Mind*, Daniel Levitin catalogues our attentional woes and offers practical, research-based advice on how to navigate and organize effectively the seemingly endless information we confront each day. A basic premise of his organizational strategy is off-loading - moving information from working memory into the environment. Even the simple act of writing lists prevents us from overriding our memory capacity. What's more, we can help our students if we understand the power of planning organization for ease of retrieval, not just neatness. Prompting students to put due dates on a calendar and write down all their assignments in one place are simple, yet powerful ways to free their minds for deeper thinking. Teaching students about the ways in which social media mongering can sap their impulse control and mental energy could easily fit into an advisor program. School wide, applying just a few of Mr. Levitin's suggestions could shift how we apply our collective brainpower each day for teaching and learning. In fact, Levitin posits that having organized minds frees us up to daydream, which in turn allows our minds to wander, make connections and solve problems. That in and of itself seems like a benevolent daydream for our students and schools.

Erica Budd, Montclair Kimberley Academy, NJ

Penguin Group (USA) LLC, 2014

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