

Research on Teachers in the Spotlight

What Makes a Great Teacher? by Amanda Ripley

As indicated in the Amanda Ripley article in the most recent Atlantic Monthly, Education Secretary Duncan has shifted accountability from the school to the teacher. Armed with stimulus money, Secretary Duncan is preparing to recognize and reward good teaching in unprecedented ways. Given this approach, Ripley's question "What Makes a Great Teacher?" takes on a new kind of urgency. Detailing research that Teach for America has conducted on its own teachers since 2000 but has until recently kept under wraps, Ripley describes findings that should be helpful as we recruit, hire, and support great teachers. Qualities of perseverance, attention to backward design, relentless preparation, and setting big goals for students-- as well as certain kinds of success in college-- comprise a set of predictions that challenge the pessimists. Once again, it appears to be the teacher who will get students where they need to go regardless of socioeconomic deprivation or background.

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Paul A. Burke, The Nightingale-Bamford School, NY

Atlantic Monthly, January/ February 2010

ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA

Back to the Future: Single-Sex Classrooms and the Middle School Student

Single-Sex Classrooms Are Succeeding, by Michael Gurian, Kathy Stevens, and Peggy Daniels

This fascinating article in Educational Horizons presents a compelling case for implementing single-sex classes in co-educational schools. According to this research, profiled public and private schools experienced substantial changes in student achievement and classroom atmosphere as a direct result of offering single-sex classes. The author studies several schools where single-sex classes reduced the growing gender gap in academic achievement. Contrary to the traditional single-sex independent or Catholic school models, these "new alternatives" establish single-sex classes in core subjects for grades six and seven. The schools reported that single-sex classes greatly reduced social anxiety, created camaraderie and improved academic performance for students.

Katalyn Vidal, EdM Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, New York, NY

Educational Horizons v. 87 no. 4 (Summer 2009) p. 234-45

Challenging the Sacred Cow of Learning Styles

Matching Teaching Style to Learning Style May Not Help Students, by David Glenn

In this nuanced article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, David Glenn lays out the contours of a significant disagreement among experts about the meaning of the current research into learning styles. It has become a truism in educational circles that teachers should match their teaching styles to their students' learning styles or, at the very least, teach with a wide array of strategies that will meet a variety of learning needs. In reviewing the research over the last ten years, Professor Pashler of the University of California at San Diego posits a controversial finding--that student learning is best served when the teaching methods match the content being taught rather than the learning styles of students. For example, verbal learners may not enjoy science experiments as much as kinesthetic learners, but in the end they will retain more in Science from doing the hands-on work than from reading the textbook. Glenn's analysis includes as counterpoint some of Professor Pashler's most vocal critics, who include Professor Sternberg of Tufts University, one of the pioneers of learning style theory.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM

The Chronicle of Higher Ed, December 15, 2009

A Concise Review of Curricular Trends

Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World, Edited by Heidi Hayes Jacobs

In this compilation, Jacobs, whose work on curriculum design and mapping is well known to most educators, shares some of her own thinking and then chooses a series of essays by other experts on trends and visions in a curriculum for the future. Writers in this ASCD published text have all gotten their hands dirty in the curricular workplace, and we are treated to current thinking about sustainability, digital portfolios, and global education, to name a few of the key buzzwords addressed in a variety of ways in this book. Less a synthesis of conceptual research and more a review for those who practice curriculum, the text is worth a look no matter where you stand on Jacob's signature contribution, curriculum mapping, about which there is less than expected in this book.

Peter Herzberg, Coordinating Editor

Association for Curriculum Development, 2010

Beyond Skinned Knees

Smart Empathy, by Wendy Mogel

She's done it again. Dr. Wendy Mogel has penned an article in the Winter 2010 issue of Independent School magazine that is every bit as timely and telling as her-now canonical-*Blessings of a Skinned Knee*. Entitled *Smart Empathy*, this essay offers a wise and savvy take on how schools and teachers should interact with especially anxious or demanding parents during troubled times like these. Its initial premise stems from the financial woes that many private school parents are currently facing. But Mogel's incisive treatment of the topic resonates much more broadly beyond families' potential financial concerns alone. She thus explores how schools can nurture and cultivate more resilient, self-reliant, loyal and supportive attitudes and behaviors in our parent bodies. We must do this, she asserts, by "getting smarter" about setting firmer limits and clearer roles and boundaries within the home-school partnership. Even empathy, Mogel shows, has a dark side. So she offers us a sample here of what a smarter sort of empathy can look like in our schools.

Mike Pardee, Kinkaid School, TX

Independent School Magazine, Winter 2010

Shadow Teachers

The Replacements, An Op-Ed Essay by Carolyn Bucior

At first blush, the hiring, training, and deployment of substitute teachers may sound like a fairly mundane and technical issue. But as the author of this New York Times editorial shares details of her two years spent as a substitute teacher, and then widens the scope of her piece to encompass current practice regarding substitutes, it becomes clear that this is a topic worthy of examination. Statistically, the absence rate of classroom teachers translates to almost a year's worth of instruction by substitutes during the course of a typical K through 12 education. Bucior also provides a substitute's view of both useful and useless faculty lesson plans and school practices, which should be instructive to both teachers and administrators. Though firmly focused on public schools, this article may provide a useful context in which to rethink substitute policies and practice in each of our schools, where we are often caught between imposing on colleagues for coverage and drawing from an unevenly vetted substitute list.

Chris Lauricella, The Park School, NY

New York Times, January 2, 2010

How Common Will Common Standards Become?

U.S. Common-Standards Push Bares Unsettled Issues, by Sean Cavanagh

Forty-eight states have committed to the idea of adopting a set of common (national) academic standards. The push for common standards first evolved in the post-Sputnik era of the late 1950s but now is bolstered by the economic crisis, lagging achievement gains and international achievement comparisons. Support for common standards is coming from high places - the Council of Chief State School Officers (state education commissioners), the National Governors Association and teacher unions. President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan are backing the development of common standard and assessments through the pledge of \$350 million in federal economic-stimulus money. Independent school educators should follow the development of common standards with interest and concern. If public schools achieve consensus about the skills and knowledge students should master at particular grade levels parents may be reluctant to transfer students to independent schools with substantially different curriculum. This article describes well the impetus for national standards, the meaning of standards and the political and educational concerns that are being raised.

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center, NY

Education Week, January 14, 2010

The Pell Grant Standard: A Failed Promise?

That Old College Lie, by Kevin Carey

From this small, progressive journal of ideas comes a sharply worded, provocative editorial on the failures of Higher Education to live up to the promise embodied in the Pell Grant. At least that is the catalyst for this essay decrying the expense of college education, the lack of transparency about measuring actual results (impact on students) of a four year degree, and the purchasing of reputations on the part of the few elite universities to the detriment of the many. The relevancy of the argument for an independent school audience is twofold. For one, as college prep schools, we ought to be concerned about issues of quality, cost, and the deceptive power of reputation at the college level. But more interesting-the second point of interest-- is that the argument reflects a parallel debate at our level about evaluating good teaching and also about value for cost, the subject of an article in this winter's Independent School Magazine. Despite its evident bias, at the very least this readable piece will get you to think about the absence of dialogue between higher and secondary education, a conversation still waiting to happen and in which independent schools might play a valuable role.

Peter Herzberg, Brearley School, NY

Democracy: A Journal of Ideas, Winter 2010

BOOKS

Pillars of the Community

Leading Adult Learning: Supporting Adult Development in Our Schools, by Eleanor Drago-Severson, Ph.D.

Drago-Severson synthesizes research on adult learning and educational leadership to construct a vision of how schools can best enhance adult development and become true learning centers by realizing four "pillar" practices: teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. Drago-Severson articulates each of these principles with a thoughtful literature review, stories of best practice, and experiences of different faculty members based on how they understand their roles as educators. *Leading Adult Learning* may emphasize literature review to a fault, but it also grounds that research with practical case studies and thought-provoking prompts that ask you to consider both your own development as a leader and the growth of all adults in your school community.

Joshua Pretzer, Culver Academies, Culver, IN

Corwin Press, 2009

Formative Assessment, with Science as a Model

Formative Assessment for Secondary Science Teachers, by Dr. Erin Furtak

How do you know what your students know and learn? How can you build trust so that students will show you their thinking in a timely enough way so that you can correct misconceptions and nurture their learning? Based on research in American and international schools, this practical guide to the theory, stages and varieties of formative assessment is a valuable and accessible tool for secondary science teachers and departments. Part One defines the parameters of formative assessment and illustrates ways to plan, embed, and evaluate the impact of the three-step feedback cycle. Part Two describes and shows samples of five format types, with design and use suggestions applicable across a range of grade levels and subject areas. Dr. Furtak, formerly of Stanford University and the Max Planck Institute, Berlin, is currently Assistant Professor with the University of Colorado School of Education at Boulder. In the changing landscape of student assessment, other disciplines might want to take a look as well.

Peggy Bleyberg, Hillel Academy, Jamaica, West Indies

Corwin Press, CA, 2009

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