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Focus on the Teacher Continues to Move Center Stage

Building A Better Teacher, by Elizabeth Green

In the March 7th, 2010 *New York Times Magazine*, Elizabeth Green thoughtfully outlines educational research that has drawn fairly clear conclusions that the only real predictor of student success is having a strong teacher. Yet pinpointing the variables that ensure the efficacy of the teacher have proved quite elusive. Research shows that it is not high standardized test scores, merit pay, graduate degrees, extroversion, or licensing that predict good teaching. She profiles two educators, Doug Lemov and Deborah Lowenberg Ball, both of whom have tried to describe the behaviors of truly effective teachers through substantive and thorough research and observation. Lemov has compiled a taxonomy of teaching in a book that will be released this spring entitled *Teach Like a Champion: the 49 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College*. Professor Lowenberg's work focuses on the specific content knowledge that she sees as the *sine qua non* of effective pedagogy. Green suggests that combining the insights of these two educators would have an enormous effect on the training offered by graduate schools of education as well as having the potential of dramatically improving classroom teaching across the nation.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM
 (an additional digest for this article was submitted by:
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New York Times Magazine, March, 2010

ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



The Awkward Alchemy of Evaluations by Students and Consumer Mentality

Teacher Evaluations, by Diane Auer Jones

In this incisive article and blog post from the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Diane Auer Jones, a former professor, addresses a shift at the college level in the ways that students and professors view the student evaluation process. Instead of trying to understand how much they learned in a given course, students have moved to thinking of themselves as "consumers" of the college experience and focus almost solely on whether they enjoyed the class or liked the teacher. Jones points out that the consumer model is problematic both for the students who may miss out on crucial content and skills as they move further into their majors and finally to the workplace, and also for the teachers as they try to assess what pedagogical strategies actually help students to learn rather than simply entertain or reassure them about their performance. Such a consumer model is a subtle form of disenfranchisement. Jones offers some alternative ways to collect data on a teacher's efficacy such as interviewing teachers in subsequent courses, interviewing employers, and monitoring student complaints systematically. The article is equally pertinent to secondary education and might make a good conversation starter as administrators reassess their own student evaluation systems.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM

The Chronicle of Higher Education, January, 2010



The Fallacy of Giftedness in High Stakes Admissions

The Junior Meritocracy, by Jennifer Senior

Jennifer Senior seeks to drive another nail in the IQ coffin in this well researched and anecdotal article. Ms. Senior describes the pressure and anxiety young students (K-1) and parents feel when confronted by the ubiquity of IQ scores as a benchmark in the independent school admission process. The research, however, is becoming clearer each year that intelligence can be taught and that certain qualities such as perseverance and resiliency are more closely connected with high academic achievement. The article calls into question the labeling of students as "gifted," another facet of the "fixed mindset" idea, while also addressing the inequity that arises from our reliance on IQ testing to assess a four year old's potential. While the article centers on the high stakes admissions process for private and selective public elementary schools in New York City, the situation will be sadly familiar for most independent school educators.

Eric Temple, The Carey School, CA

New York Magazine, February 8, 2010



Fire The Teachers?

Why We Can't Get Rid of Failing Teachers and Schoolyard Brawl, by Evan Thomas and Pat Wingert

This front page special report details the effect of teacher quality (research shows that children who have two strong teachers in a row will excel, while those who have two weak teachers will never recover) and a lack of performance accountability in public education (for example, three out of 30,000 tenured teachers in New York City were dismissed for cause). The authors hypothesize that recruiting strong teachers and firing bad ones is the highest-leverage activity that a school system can undertake to affect a truly positive change in student outcomes. By way of support, the article details some of the successes enjoyed by KIPP schools and a reinvented New Orleans school district, both of which created systems that balance autonomy and accountability outside of the influence of teacher unions. A companion piece, *Schoolyard Brawl*, details the mounting tension regarding teacher autonomy and unions as personified by Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers and Michelle Rhee, chancellor of the Washington, D.C. schools. This article provides a very good "primer" of the conversation regarding teacher accountability that has gained momentum over the last few years.

Chris Lauricella, The Park School, NY

Newsweek, March 15, 2010



Translating an Older Theory from One Stressful Era into Another

Leadership Styles and Stress Outcomes, by Mark Hanna

This article looks at the effect that transformational and transactional leadership styles, first described in the 1970's by James MacGregor Burns, have on a variety of outcomes during conditions of stress. Though the article is geared toward the business world, such a study of two leadership styles is relevant to the stressful and unpredictable world of schooling as well. The original theory looked at how leaders transformed "subordinates" through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual motivation, and individual consideration. By subjecting the current study's subjects to a brief but stressful intellectual task and measuring response to the way directions were given, the experiment showed that inspirational motivation and individual consideration in particular mitigated some of the stress to produce more successful outcomes. The study reviewed how CEO's are motivating workers in an era when resilience has become more important as an antidote to helplessness. When translated into independent school leadership, the values to keep in the forefront are transparent sharing of financial considerations, informal time spent with faculty, and mentoring and recognition of good performance.

Peter Herzberg, Brearley School, NY

Wharton Leadership Digest, January, 2010
 (references in Marshall Memo)



A Social Network for Educators

The Educators PLN

This Ning site is a one-stop-shop for initiating, developing or refining an educator's Professional Learning Network (PLN). The on-line community serves as a virtual gathering place for teachers of all backgrounds engaged in meaningful discussions about what works in education and how they can improve their own practice. There are groups for different subject areas and the site facilitates a weekly live chat about a topic in education on Twitter called #edchat, the subject of which is decided on by a poll of participants. The Educators PLN is a rich opportunity for connection with others who may be out of your geographic area, but with whom you share an interest in improving educational practice. Also, as in all social networks, while one can learn a great deal just by visiting the site, the utility of this tool will be directly proportional to one's engagement and willingness to become involved in conversations.

Emily McCarren, Ed.M Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, NY

NING Site, Professional Learning Network

BOOKS



Can Desire for Change and Desire for Comfort Ride the Same Elephant?

Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard, by Chip Heath and Dan Heath

The Heath brothers construct *Switch* by borrowing an analogy that likens our emotional side to an elephant and our rational side to its rider. They then apply this analogy to the process of change, arguing that the elephant (emotions) and the rider (rationality) must be synchronized in order for real and lasting change to occur. The book follows this central theme and draws on myriad anecdotal case studies and social science research to offer practical advice regarding how to address the cognitive, emotional, and environmental barriers to change or, more hopefully, how to align these domains to allow change to occur. *Switch* is a compendium of useful information for those charged with leading change reminiscent of the works of Malcolm Gladwell.

Chris Lauricella, The Park School, NY

Random House, February 2010



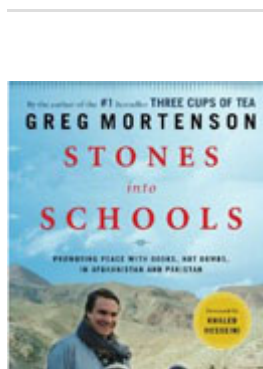
Pragmatic Cognitive Science for Classroom Teachers

The Architecture of Learning: Designing Instruction for the Learning Brain, by Kevin Washburn

Published by a company dedicated to the professional development of teachers and the application of neuroscience to learning, this book is an accessible and meaningful consideration of the many recent and longstanding findings in cognitive science and how they should be informing the design and implementation of learning environments. Washburn weaves relevant examples into his writing in a way that makes the simple act of reading the book a lesson in good teaching. The text models the concepts and leaves readers with clear guidance for aligning the important discoveries about learning with effective teaching and meaningful assessment. A copy of this text within arms reach of educators will help inform the architecture of their planning and their classroom.

Emily McCarren, Ed.M Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, NY

Clerestory Press, 2010



Drinking Tea with Greg Mortensen: the Sequel

Stones into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, by Greg Mortensen

"If you teach a boy, you educate an individual; but if you teach a girl, you educate a community." (Tanzanian proverb)

This sequel to Mortensen's 2006 best seller, *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School at a Time*, is hard to put down. It was written after Mortensen's non-profit Central Asia Institute had been established and, in conjunction with the local inhabitants, built more than 130 schools, most of them for girls, in remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. This second account follows Mortensen and his rag-tag band of school developers as they try to fulfill a promise made in 1999 to a band of horsemen from Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor to construct a school in an isolated pocket of the Pamir Mountains. Despite earthquakes and war, Mortensen convincingly communicates that education—especially education for girls— is the single most important factor on the road to peace, stability and the empowerment of Afghanistan citizens. In supporting this education, he suggests, Americans have an opportunity to support Afghans as they try to build their society without the use of violence by offering grassroots alternatives to extremist indoctrination. *Stones into Schools* is an eye-opening account of an immeasurable gift of education that should never be taken for granted.

Annemarie Bacich, Ed.M. Candidate, Klingenstein Center, NY

Viking, 2009

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