

OF NOTE

[A Wilder Kindness](#)

George Saunders's Advice to Graduates, by Joel Lovell

Only every once in a while does one hear or read a truly memorable graduation speech, one whose effect lingers long after the event itself. George Saunders delivered such an address last spring at Syracuse University. Saunders' short stories throw off linguistic sparks. Here he is powerfully understated in his presentation of a regretful memory of his failure to truly intercede on behalf of an isolated classmate. The classmate was not bullied in any sensational manner; she was simply left out in an unkind way. Saunders still thinks about his own "failure of kindness" these many years later, wishing he could have been less sensible, less reserved. There is a quiet urgency in his message, underlined by the simultaneous ordinariness and intensity of his memory. His deepest hope for the graduates of Syracuse University, and for the rest of us, is that we all will grow in our ability to "err on the side of kindness." Independent schools pride themselves on creating communities of inclusion and compassion; Saunders' text might be one to use with students and faculty as we seek to reinforce the important message that our schools should be places where everybody feels valued, where everybody's gifts and talents are honored.

Stephanie Lipkowitz, Albuquerque Academy, NM

New York Times, July 13, 2013

Klingbrief is a free, monthly publication of recommended articles, books, research reports and media selected by and for independent school educators. The Klingenstein Center for Independent School Leadership provides graduate programs and professional development for independent school educators throughout their careers. For information about submitting to Klingbrief, please click [here](#).

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ARTICLES, BLOGS, AND OTHER MEDIA



[The Business of School](#)

Tours of Duty: The New Employer-Employee Compact, by Reid Hoffman, Ben Casnocha, and Chris Yeh

[registration required to view this article]

Here's a fun game: pick up a copy of the Harvard Business Review, and substitute "school" for "company," "education" for "business," and "teachers" for "employees." Then step back and listen to what the folks in the B-school can tell you. If you play the game with "Tours of Duty," you'll hear about three policies (i.e., "best practices") for thriving amidst change in employer-employee relationships. The tips are succinct and practical enough, offering ideas that independent schools should consider: hire employees for defined "tours of duty" rather than implicit, or unpredictable, lifetime guarantees; encourage networking outside the organization; and activate an employee alumni network that facilitates career-long relationships between employers and former employees. Beyond these three suggestions, the most interesting aspect of the article is the authors' emphasis on establishing professional relationships that generate trust, creativity, and self-direction. The authors suggest that investing in colleagues' employability (not just their current employment), inviting colleagues to build relationships with (and acquire skills and resources through) folks outside the community, and nurturing connections with former colleagues contribute to the creation of a strong, flexible culture. Few schools, if any, would argue that this business aspiration is one we share, and that relevant guidance is welcome.

Bill Hulseman, Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, MD

Harvard Business Review June 2013: 48-58



[Check Your Research](#)

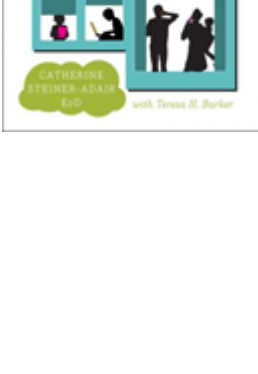
Guesses and Hype Give Way to Data in Study of Education, by Gina Kolata

In this *New York Times* special education issue, Gina Kolata reviews studies completed by the "little known" Institute of Education Sciences. One report points to the importance of instructional materials. They are, according to the institute, integral to student learning. Even more revealing is the fact that the study employed a scientific method common in hospitals, but not in schools: "randomized clinical trials." When schools were given different text books to use, and then the results were carefully measured, the content of the textbook influenced student learning as much as the effectiveness of the teacher. For independent schools that pride themselves on hiring content specialists, this news, and the way the study arrived at it, is both encouraging and challenging. Often, our homegrown content makes our programs special and unique; at the same time, we routinely employ said content without testing its efficacy. We rely, instead, on our ability to change curriculum nimbly, adjusting when we believe students are not learning. Though the conclusions reported by Kolata may not alter practice, the article serves as a reminder of the difficult and vital necessity of employing clear scientific methods to the work we do in schools, even if we can rationalize less rigorous approaches.

Eric Temple, Lick-Wilmerding High School, CA

New York Times, September 3, 2013

BOOKS



[Mommy, Daddy, and Screen Makes Three](#)

The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age, by Catherine Steiner-Adair

In her timely new book, psychologist Catherine Steiner-Adair explores how parents' plugged-in lifestyles may have an impact on their children's development. Using research findings and anecdotes, Steiner-Adair traces her theme across all stages of development, spanning from digital-native toddlers to digital-immigrant adults. In the process, she crafts an excellent resource for parents. Steiner-Adair provides a clear vision of the challenges faced by each age group, as well as thoughtfully crafted scripts parents might use with their children to springboard essential conversations about technology. A central premise of the book is that a clear benefit of technology is its potential to support education; on the other hand, that digital engagement must be balanced by a continued focus on nurturing healthy brains, bodies, and human connections. Steiner-Adair implicitly invites educators to grapple with an important question: when we invite technology to co-teach with us, what are we doing to supplement the human dimension in our classrooms? We must be clear with students and their families about how they may and may not use their devices, and perhaps more important, we must redouble our efforts to foster empathy in our students, to nurture in-person communication, and to create opportunities for distraction-free deep thinking.

Cricket Mikheev, Pear Tree Point School, CT
Ed.M. Candidate, The Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

Harper Collins, 2013



[Teacher Unlimited](#)

The Best Teachers in the World: Why we don't have them and how we could, by John E. Chubb

In international comparisons of student achievement the US ranks 10th behind Iceland in reading and 10th behind Hungary in mathematics. Author John Chubb argues that if the US wants the best achievement in the world, we have to build the strongest teaching force. Research is conclusive that aside from family background and personal attributes, teachers are the most important determinant of how much students achieve in school. Building on extant research on teacher quality and examples from KIPP, Teach for America, and Peabody's teacher training program, Chubb lays out a plan that radically departs from current policies and practices. To improve outcomes, he says, start by hiring well-educated graduates of selective academic colleges and choose principals who themselves were highly successful teachers. Rely on technology in place of "whole group" teaching, thereby reducing personnel costs. Using value-added assessments and qualitative rubrics, identify teachers who sustain high achievement and teachers who fail to get results. Provide bonuses to increase retention of teachers at the top and de-select those at the bottom. Chubb, currently the president of the National Association of Independent Schools, is riling against district, state, and federal policies that restrict hiring practices in public schools to certified teachers and constrain decisions about curriculum and instruction. While independent schools are free of these policies, Chubb's recommendations about accountability, technology, and faculty incentives are likely to stimulate healthy, if not passionate, discussion.

Pearl Rock Kane, Klingenstein Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

Harper Collins, 2013



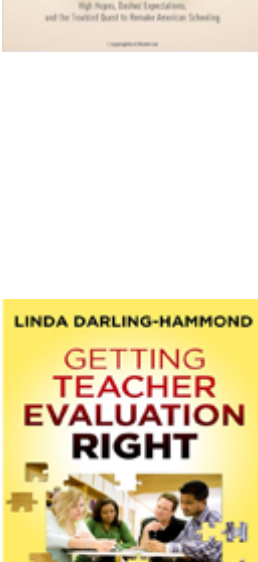
[Follow the Students](#)

The Smartest Kids in the World, by Amanda Ripley

Why do American students perform so poorly in relation to their peers across the world? Amanda Ripley set out on a journey to find out. After following three exchange students who spent their high school years abroad in Finland, South Korea, and Poland, poring over education data, and even taking the PISA test herself, she concludes: "People in [every educational superpower] agreed on the purpose of school: . . . to help students master complex academic material." Finland, Korea, and Poland have distinctly different educational cultures. What the three share is high expectations for all students. This isn't the only insight in Ripley's vibrantly told, uniquely structured tale. Comparing teachers in Finland and America, for example, she demystifies the Finnish advantage. All Finnish teachers trained in one of that nation's most prestigious and selective universities. They are "smart," have a clear set of educational standards to which they adhere, and know how to teach. This last statement nearly describes the core faculty at many independent schools, and it should remind us that we are in better shape than many of the American schools it implicitly critiques. But what will we do with that advantage, and how will we continue to challenge the many "smartest kids" that fill our own classrooms?

Bruce Shaw, Bruce A Shaw Consulting
Trustee, Glen Urquhart School, MA

Simon & Schuster, 2013



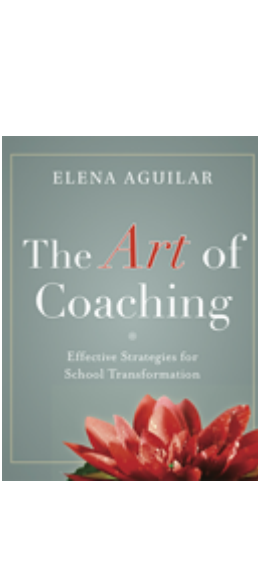
[History and Future](#)

The Allure of Order: High Hopes, Dashed Expectations, and the Troubled Quest to Remake American Schooling, by Jal Mehta

Jal Mehta's analysis of the last century of education serves multiple purposes. First, it acts as a history of reform movements in American education. Best, it adds a layer of analysis to those movements, chronicling why they have successively failed. Most important, it examines how public schooling has suffered from a misguided application of assembly-line mentality. What distinguishes Mehta's thesis is its focus on moving away from our obsession with back-end, diffuse accountability and reorienting towards front-end training and federal support. In other words, he trots out Finland, Korea, and Singapore again, only with an American cast and a refreshing clarity. Since independent schools lie somewhere on the spectrum between less accountability on the back-end and highly customized ways of hiring on the front end, such a text might stir some thinking about professional development, shared practice, and the dangers of excessive standardization. Additionally, Mehta's historical analysis might help us reflect on our own school histories, both critically and proudly.

Peter Herzberg, Public Prep Network, NY

Oxford University Press, 2013



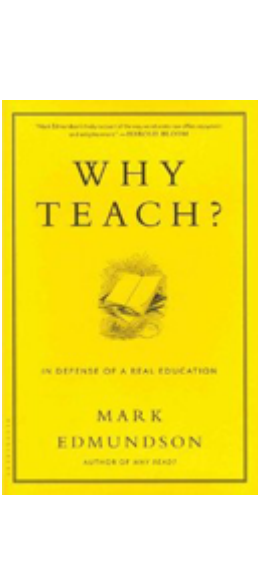
[Teacher Evaluation that Respects the Profession](#)

Getting Teacher Evaluation Right: What Really Matters for Effectiveness and Improvement, by Linda Darling-Hammond

Using extensive research collected from school districts all over the United States, as well as from international success stories Finland and Singapore, Stanford Education Professor Linda Darling-Hammond challenges American public schools to develop evaluation systems that move beyond student results on high-stakes tests. Comprehensive and successful teacher evaluation, she argues, has the following features: 1) It relies on standards-based observations using multiple sources of evidence, 2) it takes into account curricular goals and teaching context, 3) it includes teams of expert teachers and administrators, 4) it looks for evidence of contributions to the school community as well as skilled practice in the classroom and student outcomes on assessments, and 5) it integrates professional development, since the aim of evaluation is not punishment or competition but the growth of individual teachers, the school's faculty, and ultimately the teaching profession. Teacher growth and evaluation is an evergreen topic at independent schools, and nearly every constituent has both an interest in seeing it done well and an opinion about how to proceed. Darling-Hammond's primer is as good a place as any to begin (again) the discussion.

Jared Baird, Ed. M. Candidate, Klingenstein Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY

Teachers College Press, 2013



[The Art of School Transformation through Coaching](#)

The Art of Coaching: Effective Strategies for School Transformation, by Elena Aguilar

In *The Art of Coaching*, Elena Aguilar takes the mystery out of the coaching process and encourages new and experienced coaches to learn, practice, and apply the critical elements of the craft. What's more, she grounds coaching in the context of a larger goal - equity in education for all students. This broadening perspective lends heft to the individual actions and processes she describes. The coaching itself is not only about helping the individual teacher or administrator to improve, but also it serves as a vehicle for transforming schools on the systemic level. Further, as Aguilar offers coaches multiple means to connect and succeed with clients, she champions the use of strategies for leaders to view and approach their challenges. Specifically she introduces lenses for examining a situation, including inquiry, change management, and adult learning. Though not new, these lenses are contextualized through nuanced storytelling to demonstrate how they can be used to take problem-solving to a deeper, root-cause level. Aguilar's words are easily applied to the work of school leaders who, let's face it, often have to coach their faculties and each other as they angle toward results and effectiveness.

Sherri Spelic, American International School Vienna, Austria

Jossey-Bass Press, 2013



[Teaching: a Reset](#)

Why Teach? In Defense of a Real Education, by Mark Edmundson

Both a scholar and passionate teacher at The University of Virginia, Mark Edmundson has found a niche as an articulate, even artful, educational essayist. His new book of collected essays, some of which are new, begins by decrying the movement by most colleges and universities away from a spiritual mission. These days, according to Edmundson, higher education is more akin to a commercial venture. Those of us involved with pre-collegiate education would, therefore, do well to ponder one of Edmundson's underlying questions: "How do we send our students out into the world?" The second and third sections of the book are titled "Fellow Students" and "Fellow Teachers," respectively, and each reminds us that great teaching changes lives, illuminating paths for our students into uncharted territories. *Why Teach?* is a potent reminder that despite the challenges of our fast-moving and frequently unreflective lives, schools should never become overly transactional or overly concerned with credentialing young people so that they might attain additional credentials, *ad infinitum*. Teaching, instead, is a calling in which we collaborate with our students in the search for essential truths. Who knows how such a point would read in February, but let's relish it while the school year and its ideals are still in tact.

Peter Schmidt, Gill St. Bernard's School, NJ

Bloomsbury Books, 2013

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