

Fresh Perspective on Success

Thank you for such refreshing, validating ideas in “The Cult of Success” by Diana Senechal, which appeared in the Winter 2011–2012 issue. As a high school English teacher, this year I have been drowning in the bombardment of new Common Core standards, teacher evaluation methods, and revamped state testing. I’m not drowning in the sense that I am fearful of low student scores, and subsequently my own personal assessment grade, or that I’m overwhelmed with adapting my current curriculum and lesson plans to New York’s new set of standards. I could keep my head above water if I could believe it was a lake worth swimming in.

Some of my most prized personal successes from past years are the unmeasurable, and many extend beyond the classroom: helping a student revise her short story for publication in a local student literary journal, coaching the drama club students through a play that moved many parents to tears, motivating more students to join the school’s book circle.

I have successes within my classroom, as well, but those seem under attack from graphs, charts, and other data. I can’t statistically prove my students are learning valuable personal and life lessons from *Juror #8* and *Liesel Meminger*, but they are. I can prove they are reading the text closely, supporting their ideas with details, and wording responses in a grammatically appropriate manner, but those things matter less to me during my best lessons.

I agree building skills is important, but so are books—knowing them, loving them, even hating and struggling through them. I want my students in the boat with Santiago, with their hands cut and backs sore; I want them climbing up Juliet’s

The School Librarian as Ally

I support Will Fitzhugh’s assertion (in “Meaningful Work” in the Winter 2011–2012 issue) that researching and writing a history paper is important for the college-bound high school student. The history teacher—and all teachers who know the value of teaching students to write a research paper—have an ally in the school librarian. The school librarian stands next to the classroom teacher to tell students how to complete an assignment effectively and efficiently. Together they say, “Here is how to organize yourself with a good research process”; “here are some sources where you can find valuable information”; “here is how to make a works cited list.” The librarian reminds students that the research process is applicable to all academic areas. Students work hard but know that the teacher and the librarian are there to help. The librarian also can help in assessment by grading the student’s use of the research process and formatting of

the works cited, while the classroom teacher is the subject area specialist responsible for grading the content.

It’s always gratifying when freshman college students come back to visit; they make sure to thank the library staff for preparing them to write a research paper.

—MARY MONIZ
Librarian
Boston Latin Academy

Clarifying Early College

While I found “The Early College Challenge” in the Fall 2011 issue fascinating, I was surprised that no mention seems to have been made to distinguish another model under the same label—early college entrance for accelerated students.

The National Consortium of Early College Entrance Programs involves 10 institutions that deal with intellectually curious high school students who are able to handle college work early. My school, for example, Boston University



balcony, proclaiming their undying love; I want them making honey with three sisters named after months. I want to guide them through the nitty-gritty, text-based and beyond, and then I want them to take it out the door with them, in their arms, backpacks, and minds. Needless to say, the companion piece, “The Practice of Solitude,” was also welcome.

I am lucky enough to teach a dance elective, and I’m always astonished at how it often shows me perfect examples of what

teaching should look like. As a teacher, it’s been my personal model of successful differentiation and curricular planning. Many of the students who don’t shine in any core subject take dance class and thrive. It’s a sweet irony, considering it is not a graduation requirement, has no standardized testing attached, and is generally pretty data-less. It’s even considered my “extra” class.

So, thank you for the inspiring words. I will take them back to school with me, as the breaths of fresh air I’m currently gasping for. I will try to marry them to the edicts and proclamations passed down from high above, though I realize they may work better in the current educational climate as armor.

—GRETCHEN BLYNT
Downsville Central School
Downsville, NY

Academy, which is a division of Boston University (BU), enrolls students in grades 9 through 12 who will all graduate with both a high school diploma and about a year and a half of university credits. Juniors must take 40 percent of their coursework at BU, and seniors can take all of their courses there, plus they must write a senior thesis with a BU professor. If any of our freshmen and sophomores might be ready for university work (and some might even need graduate-level work), they cross the street to take it. On any given day, half of our 160 students are in university classes, plus they have access to the faculty and facilities of this major research institution. Our students can select from 2,000 electives and 22 languages.

So the label “early college” represents support for disadvantaged students needing a better transition to higher education *and* acceleration for very able students eager to spread their wings. Both models are noble, and each needs

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to be understood by its own merits, despite the confusion caused by the similarity of the label.

—**JAMES S. BERKMAN**
Head of School
Boston University Academy

Building Bridges

As a Dean of Education at Castleton State College, I was deeply appreciative of the article “Bridging the ‘Widest Street in the World’” appearing in the Summer 2011 edition of *American Educator*. At a New England Association of Schools and Colleges conference in Boston in December, I plan to talk about how our college has completed that bridge—and to mention the article by Jeffrey Mirel.

—**HONOREE FLEMING, PhD**
Dean of Education
Castleton State College
Castleton, VT

Keep Reading

I am wondering how I can continue my subscription to *American Educator*. I taught in the School District of Philadelphia, but retired in July.

—**SANDRA MASAYKO**
Philadelphia, PA

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