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A WISE RESPONSE TO MISGUIDED REFORM BY DAVID GREENE

Reform is a funny word. Everyone thinks it means to change something using a new idea or trend. The funny thing is, the longer you have been in education, the more you know that everything old is new again. Over the past dozen years or so, teachers have had a series of well-intentioned but misguided reforms forced upon them: standardized testing, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top. All tried, but none of them has proven to be the silver bullet to success that reformers claimed they were. These reforms have not addressed the central needs of both learners and teachers.

My second grade teacher knew the secret to successful education 55 years ago. She knew that different children learn differently. She also knew that each child needs to be reached as an individual and needs to have a mentor. That second grade teacher became Dr. Rita Stafford Dunn. She and her husband Kenneth Dunn are recognized experts and authors on learning styles and the importance of individualization and mentoring.

In Paul Tough's *New York Times* article "What If the Secret to Success Is Failure?" Angela Duckworth, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania, states: "This push on tests is missing out on some serious parts of what it means to be a successful human. The most critical missing piece is *character*." She found that "people who accomplished great things ... often combined a *passion for a single mission* with an unswerving dedication to

achieve that mission, whatever the obstacles and however long it might take."

What do the Dunsns, Duckworth and many other researchers tell us? An individualized passion-driven project with a mentor's support develops a "Successful Student's Character Traits: *zest, grit, self-control, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism and curiosity*." That is a description of the WISE Program—which has been in existence for 38 years. WISE has always known that every student is at risk unless we can address each student's deeply personal and unique need for an individualized learning experience—one that will provide the opportunity to explore and expand those essential character traits enumerated above. With its tested and proven



Linda Darling-Hammond speaking at Save Our Schools rally in Washington, DC.

(Continued on page 4)

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

WISE Services @ 20! On September 22, 2011, more than 200 students, WISE graduates, mentors, parents and donors came to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the founding of WISE Services and to honor our WISE Board Director and New York State Regent Harry Phillips III and the extended family of WISE schools.

Steven Brown (WISE '73) and Douglas Schwarz (WISE '77) moderated the evening with wit, efficiency and elan. Doug assumed the Board Chair from

Steven after 15 years (!) on the condition his term would not last as long. Maria Norcia Santillanes (WISE '76), our new Development Director, worked tirelessly with her team of staff, board and community to plan the event. You will be hearing frequently from Maria as she works to expand our reach and support base.

Family, colleagues and friends praised Harry and Marge Phillips, and the public conversation of WISE grads Anita Cook-Gholston (WISE '76) and Franny Hertz (WISE '78) with their WISE grad daughters riveted the audience.

Stanford University professor and international expert on teaching and learning Linda Darling-Hammond and her daughter Kia (a graduate of New Rochelle HS, where she helped start WISE as a senior in 1994) provided an enthusiastic endorsement of WISE and how it is needed now more than ever. Linda's "Top Ten List of *Why WISE Is So Wise*" can be viewed in full on our website (www.wiseservices.org) and is in print on page 8 of this Journal.

Stay with us as our WISE journey continues.



WISE SERVICES 20TH ANNIVERSARY HONORING HARRY PHILLIPS III



PHOTO CREDITS

Chuck Bell
Andrew Courtney
David Greene
Jonathan Lewis

A WISE RESPONSE TO MISGUIDED REFORM BY DAVID GREENE

(Continued from page 1)

framework, WISE is able to adapt to the infinite range of specific circumstances in which individual students find themselves.

The WISE Program is and always has been at the leading edge of reform. This past July, WISE founder Vic Levatin, Professor Mark Naison of Fordham University, WISE graduate Nia McCarthy, and yours truly led a workshop at the Save Our Schools Conference in Washington, DC on how to reinvigorate American high schools through experiential learning. Teachers, parents, students and administrators heard our panel describe how a WISE experience fulfills many of the educational objectives of Rita and Kenneth Dunn, Angela Duckworth, Deborah Meier, Diane Ravitch and Linda Darling-Hammond.

While all students are at risk, those most at risk are poor—especially poor male students. Over the past 25 years, a growing body of research has shown that males underperform (except in advanced math and science). We see this in a number of indicators: college entrance and graduation figures, SAT scores in reading and writing, graduation GPAs, admissions into honors programs, and the low percentages of boys in non-athletic extracurricular activities. In comparison to girls, boys simply do not care as much about school and school-related work. Only 70% of males graduate high school. Only 48% of African-American males and only 49% of Hispanic males graduate high school. WISE is a response to statistics such as these.

There are a number of reasons for this disparity between boys and girls. Some researchers have focused on brain differences, others on educational technique. However, they all agree that boys' learning has changed from physical apprenticeships, action, and practice to sitting in verbal/written learning environments. The result is that fidgeting and physical movement—once necessary and normal needs—are now liabilities under both No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top.

Yes, we need to give them—especially the boys—something to care about, and that's exactly what WISE does. WISE needs to be in as many schools as pos-

sible, particularly those where the largest at risk population is male. WISE provides real world hands-on learning experiences directly connected to academic research, writing, analysis and reflection. More importantly, it provides the central thing that every student and teacher really needs: something to be passionate about . . . as my second grade teacher understood 55 years ago.

David Greene is a former WISE mentor at Woodlands High School, past Coordinator of Senior Options (WISE) at Scarsdale High School and a current WISE Services staff member. He helped organize the Save Our Schools rally and conference in which WISE Services participated.

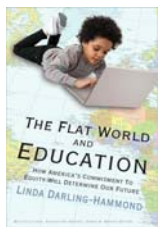
"I don't know where I would be today if my teachers' job security was based on how I performed on some standardized test. ... If they had to spend most of their time desperately drilling us and less time encouraging creativity and original ideas; less time knowing who we were, seeing our strengths and helping us realize our talents. I honestly don't know where I'd be today if that was the type of education I had. I sure as hell wouldn't be here. I do know that."

Matt Damon, Save Our Schools rally, 6/30/2011
(www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqOub-heGQc)



No, that's not David Greene ... it's Matt Damon!

WHAT WE'RE READING; WISE PICKS BY MARIA NORCIA SANTILLANES



The Flat World and Education

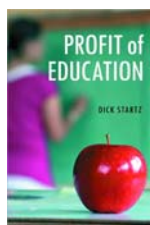
How America's Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future

By Linda Darling-Hammond

"Anyone who desires a quantum leap in the educational achievements of American students—as opposed to the 'quick fix'—

must address the issues raised in this carefully argued and well-documented work."

—Howard Gardner, Harvard Graduate School of Education



Profit of Education

How teacher-centric school reform will pay off for the taxpayer and the economy

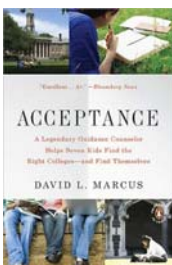
By Richard Startz

"Dick Startz has written a provocative and interesting book about how we support and compensate teachers. His recommendations

are practical, timely, and most importantly, will help improve education for our Nation's children."

—Joel Klein, former Chancellor, NYC school system

Acceptance

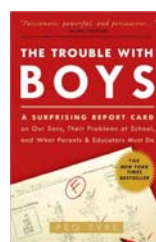


A Legendary Guidance Counselor Helps Seven Kids Find the Right Colleges

By David L. Marcus

"There are some books that are destined for the big screen, others that are natural-born TV series and some that go straight to merchandising, but I don't know if I've ever seen a book so clearly crying out to be a Broadway musical."

—Marion Winik, Special to Newsday



The Trouble with Boys

A Surprising Report Card on Our Sons, Their Problems at School, and What Parents and Educators Must Do

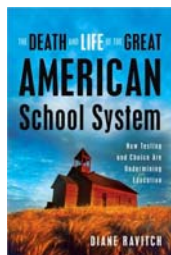
By Peg Tyre

"Tyre presents years of research and reporting from schools around the country and arrives at a gut-punch of a conclusion:

Education in the United States is not geared to boys. Teaching methods favor girls. Boys disengage as early as pre-school and never quite recover."

—Dan Zak, The Washington Post

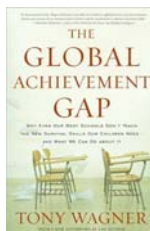
The Death and Life of the Great American School System



How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education

By Diane Ravitch

"The book that follows is, if not a mea culpa, perhaps something more valuable – a fiercely argued manifesto against fads in education reform and for public schools, and the teachers and students who inhabit them." — Boston Globe



The Global Achievement Gap

Why Our Kids Don't Have the Skills They Need for College, Careers, and Citizenship--and What We Can Do About It

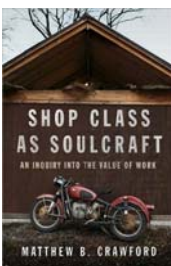
By Tony Wagner

"Tony Wagner takes us deep inside the black box of school curriculum in a way few

authors have done. What do we mean by rigor? By 21st century skills? Wagner shows us concretely what thinking skills really are, how current approaches to 'raising standards' cannot get us there, and what will. Everyone concerned with American education should read this book."

—Linda Darling-Hammond, Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education, Stanford University

Shop Class as Soulcraft



An Inquiry Into the Value of Work

By Matthew B. Crawford

"Crawford offers a stunning indictment of the modern workplace, detailing the many ways it deadens our senses and saps our vitality. And he describes how our educational system has done violence to our true nature as 'homo faber'. Better still, Crawford points in the direction of a richer, more fulfilling way of life."

—Reihan Salam, associate editor at The Atlantic

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MAKING WISE EXPERIENCES REAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES—DONNA GARR

There's nothing like hands-on, real-life experience to bring excitement to learning. NOTHING! Just think back to your school experiences. What moments do you remember most vividly? I remember my projects—like when I made a guillotine for my history class and used my Barbie doll as Marie Antoinette. I also remember which teachers made me feel special and important. This is why every student who does a WISE project remembers it, uses it, and cherishes the times shared with the mentor and on-site supervisor. And certainly, the mentors and on-site supervisors learn so much from their students, all the while sharing the joy and thrill of the journey.

As a WISE Coordinator at Westlake High School for fifteen years, and presently a Director of College Guidance at the Montfort Academy and a WISE Field Representative for WISE Services, I have had the satisfaction of observing the firsthand benefits of seniors taking the WISE option in the second semester. Not only does the program allow these students to finally spread their wings and soar, it allows them to use their experiences for college essays and interviews. One might wonder how a spring senior program could be helpful in the college application process. Since students make a commitment to the WISE option in their junior year, it gives them ample time to begin their research, make contacts, job-shadow, and explore their interests long before that college interview and essay are completed. While working with my seniors on their college essays, I have found that the majority of them write about their upcoming WISE project or discuss it with the college representatives who visit the high school. This makes sense since it is this senior project that excites them, makes them unique and teaches

them self-motivation and independence.

I have kept in touch with my “WISE guys and gals” over these many years, and we still talk about their projects, their presentations, and how this hands-on experience has affected their lives. For example, three weeks ago I attended the ten-year reunion of the class of 2001. Fourteen of those who attended did WISE projects. What did we talk about? Of course—their WISE experiences. One of my favorite stories of the evening was Christine's. For her WISE project, she was a student teacher for a third-grade class. Christine wrote a children's book in both English and Spanish and illustrated the entire work, as well. For her final presentation, she read her book to her “munchkins” and their parents, and then served refreshments. At the reunion, Christine told me that she is now an elementary school teacher in the Bronx and still reads her “WISE book” to her class. Christine shared with me that she has her students write and illustrate their own creations and finds that this WISE-inspired project is the class's favorite—future WISE ones in the making.

The Experiential Learning Cycle illustrates how students process activities, helping them to become aware and to synthesize these experiences. As educators, we're usually good about leading students through the first three steps in the Experiential Learning Cycle—Experience, Share, and Process, but we often neglect the last two stages—Generalize and Apply. These last pieces are important as they expand thinking and help students relate their learning

to the larger world.

As a WISE Field Representative, I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand students' transformations because of their WISE projects. Students report that this experience is the highlight of their thirteen years in education. They say that it is an ideal way to network for future contacts, careers, and references, especially in these precarious economic times. It is the WISE Experience that incorporates it all. It is the WISE Experience that is a real learning opportunity. It is the WISE Experience that changes lives.



Donna Garr, retired Guidance Director and WISE Coordinator at Westlake High School, currently working as a WISE Services staff member.

WISE FAMILIES



From left to right: Emilia Stern and her mother, Franny Hertz; Maya and Avery Gholston and their mother, Anita Cook-Gholston —WISE graduates, all.

Sitting onstage with my daughters sharing our WISE experiences, reminiscences and reflections with other WISE graduates was such an honor. It always surprises me to see how diverse the WISE family is. Every group is represented and the projects reflect the range of our imaginations. I am always pleasantly surprised to hear how successful the WISE Program is for students, no matter who they are or where they live. It just works!

When thinking about what I would say at the WISE Services anniversary dinner, I considered how long ago it was that I was facing senior year in high school. It was an exciting and anxiety-ridden time. So many decisions to make; so many choices ... too many. Everyone around me had expectations of me and I wasn't sure if I could live up to any of them. Having a WISE project to focus on was a welcome relief. It wasn't until many years later that I realized how important that experience actually was. It helped me put my academic experience at Woodlands into perspective and to transition from it to college. I came to know myself during that last year of high school. WISE gave me the space and time and permission to explore who I was and what I wanted for my life.

WISE was such a special experience. Thinking back on it, I realized how much it foretold my future; what I would do with my life and what kind of person I would become. But maybe, more importantly, I realized when I listened to my daughters talk about their WISE projects that the messages (my personal philosophy and values) I wanted to impart to my children had been learned by them. They each chose projects that allowed them to explore parts of themselves they had not before and that gave them opportunity to challenge themselves. The poise and self-confidence they showed at the WISE Services dinner made me very proud. It also reminded me why programs like

WISE are so important.

Young people need experiences that allow them to get to know themselves separate and apart from their parents; to determine for themselves what they value; what they care about; what they are willing to commit themselves to; what excites or bores them, etc. Those of us who have had WISE projects know that these are issues that come up again and again in our adult lives. WISE helped us begin that question and answer process with ourselves. WISE not only made it acceptable, but essential. In my lifetime, I've learned

that we make our best decisions when we are honest with ourselves about our strengths and weaknesses, our likes and dislikes, our fears and our triumphs. WISE encouraged us to see that each of us has something special to offer.

And how good is that?!

Anita Cook-Gholston — *WISE '76 and WISE Services Advisory Board member*

Sitting on the stage next to my daughter Emilia, who completed her WISE project at Rondout Valley High School in 2007, I could not help but be proud and grateful. As a WISE graduate myself and a WISE coordinator, I know the power this program has in transforming lives and enhancing future endeavors. After I described my WISE project, Emilia was asked what she thought about her Mom's project. Her reaction, "that is really cool," reminded me to be proud of myself and was a comment I will never forget. How often do we get to be "cool" through the eyes of our children and even less likely have it stated publically? Emilia's project, which involved travel and community service, was "cool"; my project, on the other hand, seemed practical and ordinary by comparison. But that is what is so great about WISE. It is not about comparisons, but is about reflection and articulation. As we sat on the stage with another Mom and her two WISE graduate daughters, I realized what an opportunity WISE creates on so many levels. I cannot wait to see what my younger daughter, Isabel, now a high school senior, does with her chance at WISE.

Franny Hertz — *WISE '78 and WISE Coordinator at Rondout Valley High School*

LINDA DARLING-HAMMOND'S TOP TEN LIST -- "WHY WISE IS SO WISE"

*...from the video shoutout by Linda Darling-Hammond and her daughter Kia (New Rochelle HS WISE, Class of 1994),
at the 20th Anniversary Celebration of the founding of WISE Services
(full video on www.wiseservices.org)*

"WISE is really a very WISE way to support education."

1. The WISE program is a model for what the learning experience should be in schools — it is authentic, it's inspiring, it's driven by students' own interests and passions and their own desire to learn.
2. WISE is really what college and career-ready standards are supposed to be about; what 21st-century skills are supposed to be about. It's about learning to learn, it's about critical thinking, it's about problem solving. It is those things that students need to have in order to be successful throughout their lives.
3. WISE is what helps students develop an understanding of how to persevere on a problem, how to learn to learn, how to find resources, how to do those things that they will have to do over and over again throughout life.
4. WISE teaches students to have their own standards, to actually self-assess and figure out whether they are achieving their own goals. And that's the kind of motivation that everyone needs to achieve at high levels in any activity or walk of life throughout their entire learning career.
5. WISE teaches everyone who is involved — the people who are mentoring are learning; the people who are evaluating the project are learning; clearly, the student who is doing it is learning. We learn most deeply those things we have to teach. And WISE puts students in the role of being teachers.
6. WISE transforms people. Many students say: "I didn't know I could do that. I'm a different person at the end of this experience than I was before."
7. WISE transforms schools. Because educators say: "Wow! I didn't know that students could do that. I didn't know we, as educators, could do this. I didn't know school could be like this." And it has a transformative effect on what happens in schools after they have initiated this process for their students. People start to ask: "What if other parts of school could be like this?"
8. WISE helps schools to connect to each other because of the WISE network, and to learn from each other. And it creates a bigger transformative influence in the field of education.
9. WISE connects students and schools to their communities.
10. WISE is so wise because of Vic Leviatin who has made it his passion to help students bring their passions to the fore and to make that become the center of the educational experience. WISE is what it is today because of his efforts and those of all of you who are watching this and who are celebrating WISE's 20th Anniversary.

September 22, 2011

