



Heller, R., Wolfe, R. E., & Steinberg, A. (Eds.) (2017). *Rethinking readiness: Deeper learning for college, work, and life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

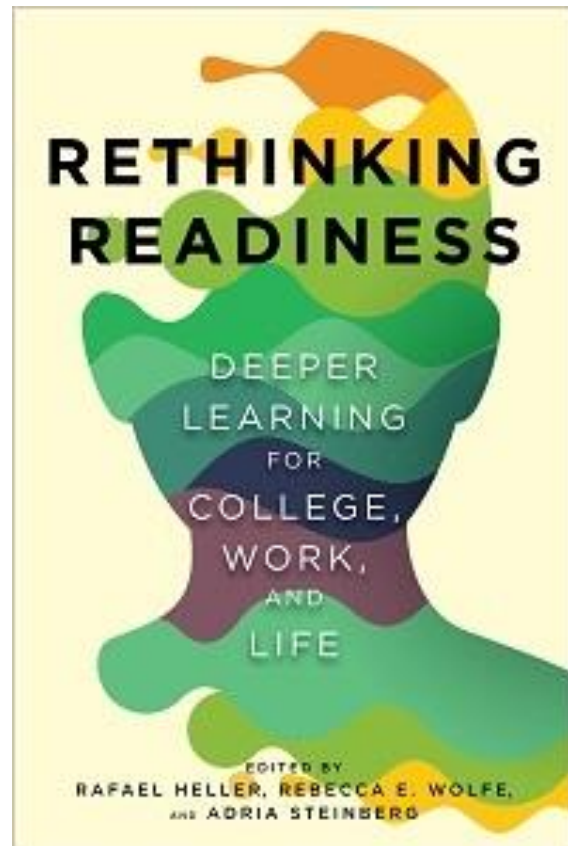
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What is the purpose of a secondary education? Has a high school diploma truly morphed into that of a middle school certification; no longer a valued capstone, rather something you obtain along the way to earning a tertiary degree or certification (Stone III, 2014)? If so, what should high schools do to best prepare all students for successful transition to postsecondary education and workforce training opportunities? What is the function of a high school in this post-modern era? And, if that focus has evolved, can traditional brick and mortar institutions continue business-as-usual practices of a bygone era? What learning is essential in this postmodern age?

The authors of *Rethinking Readiness: Deeper Learning for College, Work, and Life* expose the limitations of the one-dimensional academic foci, proposing a change to *deeper learning*. They argue that American secondary education maintains a vital role in providing not only college and career, but civic readiness. They define deeper learning and



develop understanding regarding how to successfully foster the transition to a new paradigm for education. This shift involves a transition beyond the current one-dimensional academic foci, moving beyond the older 3Rs—reading, writing, and arithmetic—to a multidimensional approach—rigor, relevance, and relationship. Readiness is thus redefined, nebulous but tangible and possibly assessable, yet as this review will suggest, maybe not fully accessible.

The editors organized the book chapters into three main areas. Part 1 introduces the reader to the concept of deeper learning through a discussion on the purpose and goals of secondary education. This section provides the reader with background information, a historical development of education, problems with educational offerings, and a solution—deeper learning. An exploration of the world of work, the benefits of workforce readiness, and the importance of civics education is included. Part 2 discusses the need for access and opportunities for deeper learning for all students. It focuses attention on the need for deeper learning experiences for students with low socioeconomic status, disabilities, and English language learners (ELLs) respectively. Part 3 discusses school improvement, with chapters that delve into “the what and how” teachers should teach, the systems and conditions that must be in place to allow for said practices and the role of both site and district administration, and an in-depth discussion on assessments and the multiple measures schools should utilize in evaluations. Finally, the editors provided readers a discussion of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), incorporating information mentioned earlier in the text.

According to the authors, the phrase *college and career readiness* has not only become cliché but inept, insufficient, incomplete. Educational institutions tend to respond with a hyper focus on academic preparation, and a

desire to prepare all students for college and university admissions. The passage of Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 allowed individual states and school districts the opportunity to transform their individual institutions into unique purveyors of deep learning. With ESSA, schools are no longer forced to follow the prescriptive guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Act. Importantly, ESSA supports local innovations. The authors argue that with these new opportunities afforded by ESSA schools can broaden their focus to include not only the mastery of academic content and skills, but expand their focus to better prepare their students for successful social participation and workforce readiness.

According to the authors, deeper learning requires a shift in focus and movement beyond content knowledge, academic mastery, and technical skill development. Consequently deeper learning calls on secondary educational institutions to allow mastery to intersect with identity and creativity. This approach goes beyond the skills vs content and concepts over facts divide, requiring learning to be captivating and engaging, hands-on and collaborative, interdisciplinary and real world, and open-minded and open-ended. Therefore, deeper learning requires secondary schools to afford all students, including those of low socioeconomic status, others who may possess a disability, or many who struggle to learn English, educational experiences that foster the development of higher-order skills and mindsets needed for success in life.

The authors stress the point that fostering deeper learning requires systematic change. Implications exist for multiple variables which include use of varying curricula, employment of different instructional methods, establishing independent education policies, and using multiple measures to assess learners. While the authors contend that teachers play a vital role in deeper learning, they recognize that

support must exist outside of the classroom and beyond school grounds. District administrators must understand what said practices require, support efforts for deeper learning, and allow for the professional development to assist staff develop new instructional practices. The adoption and development of new courses and alterations of bell schedules to accommodate deeper learning will require the support of and approval of school boards and top management. Furthermore, deeper learning will require that students apply what they have learned, sometimes collaboratively. The focus on application and collaboration will require teachers to embrace depth over breadth with regard to subject matter exposure, classroom activities may require a looser structure and not fit into standard pacing guides, and learning goals and assessment may include the development and demonstration of soft skills and mindsets such as adaptability, creativity, communication, persistence, and resiliency in addition to content mastery. The authors provided examples of the above mentioned in the text, contrasting the methods of a satisfactory conventional teacher to one who employs deeper learning as well as multiple real world proprietors. Finally, use of a system of multiple measures that incorporates new judgements beyond reading and mathematics, such as attitude toward learning, social/emotional, and allows for more than one correct answer/response is suggested.

The editors established a much-needed conceptual framework for deeper learning composed of three main competencies. Each competency has two corresponding goals. The cognitive competency includes goals that involve mastery of academic content and critical thinking and problem solving. The interpersonal competency contains goals that assist students with the enhancement of collaboration and communication. Finally, the goals written for the development of intrapersonal competencies focus on assisting

students with learning how to learn and fostering of learning mindsets.

One of the greatest strengths of the book is its emphasis on workforce readiness—over career readiness—that allows for better clarity, understanding, and focus for educators, students, and parents. The text does an excellent job discussing the shortcomings of the term career readiness, a concept that tends to be nebulous and intangible. Decades ago, Super (1957) defined career as lifestyle, and since then people have often incorrectly mistaken “career” as a synonym for “occupation”. Importantly, adolescents should expect to average 10 occupations throughout their career (Savickas, 2005). In addition, many teachers and administrators revert back to college readiness as the means of meeting the aims, goals, and objectives of career readiness.

Hoffman’s workforce readiness provides a more realistic goal and motive for learning. As an advocate of workforce counseling (Preble, 2017b), I found Hoffman’s chapter on *The Power of Work-based Learning* and her discussion on work refreshingly poignant. Work, omnipresent and highly influential, impacts everyone (Preble, 2017a). Workforce counseling is a systematic approach to career counseling at the secondary level that aims to better prepare students for the transition from school to work. As a high school counselor I no longer ask students “what they want to be,” an often problematic inquiry which assumes that an individual selects an occupation of interest to work toward and commit to in adolescence. In contrast, workforce counseling focuses on the development of soft and technical skills as well as mindsets that enhance employability in a highly competitive, ever-changing, high tech, and global marketplace.

The text unfortunately missed an opportunity to highlight some key opportunities for deeper learning. For example, career and technical education

(CTE) is all-too-often overlooked solution, given step-child status in secondary environments where the spotlight shines on Advanced Placement and Honors offerings brought about by the college-for-all mentality, which maintains the goal of sending all students to a four-year institution. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) integration also can provide opportunities for real-world, deep learning. An example of deeper learning in STEM integration exists around the new, interesting, and relevant topic of drones (Preble, 2015). Students can learn about design methods and materials, develop problem-solving and algorithmic thinking abilities, discuss and debate appropriate use, while working in groups to construct a drone. After, they can apply concepts such as gravity, friction, drag, aerodynamics, thrust, and propulsion to when they fly their creation.

One of Einstein's definitions of insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting a different result. School systems seem stuck in this reality. As a high school counselor who helps enroll students from a plethora of different schools, districts, and states, it seems as if most public institutions afford the same type of comprehensive education with minute differences. While this makes transitions between institutions easy, we need alternatives. And not just for those who are underperforming or misbehaving. Not every student learns the same way on the same day. Though we celebrate choice and individuality, all seems to be homogenous with regard to the majority of schooling opportunities.

Education always seems to be at a crossroads, in peril, in the spotlight, something American culture feigns value in yet routinely slights in practice. Educators and those who study or are involved in education tend to focus on the systematic limitations and failures of our secondary offerings, formal brick-and-mortar factory systems established in the industrial age that teach scattered and often irrelevant facts and skills, which lack

authenticity and relevance and create boredom. Mark Twain once declared, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." Indeed, there is a marked difference between learning, education, and schooling.

The grass tends to look greener, especially when one compares America's academic achievement on a global scale, noting the ever-dropping rank of the United States on performance indices. And yet all eyes remain on the United States, the birthplace for innovation and creativity, somewhat spawned by our "broken system" (Zhao, 2009), and questions abound. Are adolescents in this era capable of meeting our expectation of readiness, college, career, and civic respectfully? What role should we expect parents to play in developing readiness? Even if support from business and industry is fostered, fully implementing deeper learning will require a change in social consciousness.

A great percentage of my students require remediation at the tertiary level, fail to obtain associate or baccalaureate degrees, or find gainful or meaningful employment after high school let alone after obtaining a four-year degree. The longer I practice as a high school counselor the more value I see in gap years, working and studying abroad, or military service, the later seemingly being an excellent purveyor of career and civic readiness.

Systematic change is needed to ensure students in the postmodern era are better prepared for the world of work and career/life success. *Rethinking Readiness: Deeper Learning for College, Work, and Life* provides a rationale and examples of how schools can provide meaningful learning experiences in the era of ESSA. Comprehensive and written for a broad audience, this work of well-organized individual compositions flows. The authors' and editors' arguments, insights, and welcomed focus on workplace and civic readiness make sense. The text provides

ample examples of deeper learning in specialized schools and comprehensive classroom instruction. Sadly, although opportunity for diversification and change exist, restructuring funding and budgeting practices and business models, eliminating many “tried and true” metrics used to measure school success. Much more is needed


to usher in a monumental paradigm shift. Organizational and institutional changes take time. Educational systems are based upon Carnegie units, seat time, student-to-teacher ratios, grading scales, bell schedules, tradition, and norms. And, many will want to maintain the status quo.

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About the Reviewer


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