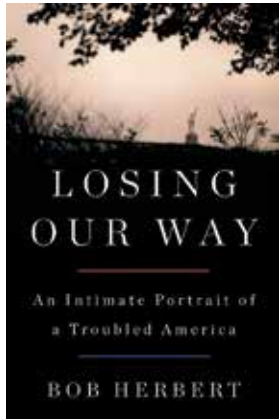


LOSING OUR WAY: AN INTIMATE PORTRAIT OF A TROUBLED AMERICA



In *Losing Our Way: An Intimate Portrait of a Troubled America* (Doubleday), former *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert tells the stories of individuals whose lives have been irreparably changed by our country's misguided policies on a range of interconnected issues: the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the neglect of America's crumbling infrastructure, and the lack of funding for public schools.

His chapters on public education will resonate with educators who know firsthand the challenges that poor children bring to school. We meet the principal of a Pittsburgh elementary school where nearly all students live in poverty. Herbert describes her efforts and those of her teachers "to reduce tardiness and truancy" and "to make reading a big deal." At the same time, he explains how federal education policies that focus on high-stakes testing by linking teacher pay and evaluations to student test scores actually hamper attempts to provide students a broad education that

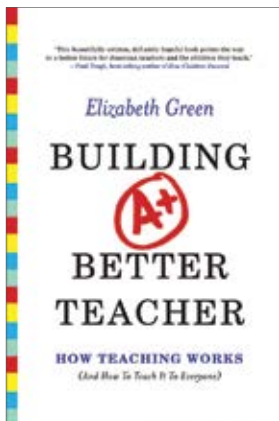
includes art, music, social studies, and science—the very subjects they need to become well-rounded adults.

We also meet a group of Pittsburgh parents who mobilized against now former governor Tom Corbett after he repeatedly cut school funding. These parents worked with members of their community to harness the power of social media and public protest to make last fall's election a referendum on the governor's education agenda.

And in a chapter titled "Cashing In on Schools," Herbert explains "the titanic influence" of the Bill & Melinda Gates, Eli and Edythe Broad, and Walton Family foundations on education policy. The latter foundation, he notes, "has unabashedly pushed a privatization agenda that, in addition to strong support for privately run charter schools, would siphon money from public schools by funneling tax dollars, in the form of vouchers and other initiatives, to families that want to send their children elsewhere."

Herbert's book is a largely bleak account of how the wealthy influence policies that directly hurt the poor and middle class. But his uplifting story of how Pittsburgh community members "have enjoyed significant success in their fight to reclaim the public schools from corporate-style reformers" is one that we can all learn from. "Democracy might have taken a beating in the United States in recent years, but it is not dead," Herbert writes. "A tremendous amount of power still resides with the people."

BUILDING A BETTER TEACHER: HOW TEACHING WORKS (AND HOW TO TEACH IT TO EVERYONE)



Teachers have a huge impact on their students, but what is it that makes teachers great? Is terrific teaching a skill that can be learned or simply a matter of charisma? These questions are the focus of Elizabeth Green's book *Building a Better Teacher: How Teaching Works (And How to Teach It to Everyone)* (Norton).

Green, a journalist and cofounder of GothamSchools (now Chalkbeat), examines the work of Magdalene Lampert and Deborah Loewenberg Ball, education professors in Michigan who set out to describe and codify a set of explicit practices for teaching math. Green's

research then explores the influence and similarities among those efforts underway in Michigan, the teaching methods underlying Japanese "lesson study," the techniques of an Italian language school, the teaching strategies of author and educator Doug Lemov, and others. In researching their work, Green comes to focus on the importance of pedagogical content knowledge, or the intersection between teaching methods and subject matter, in how we best teach the craft of teaching.

She also does something that few education writers attempt: she tries her hand at teaching. In the book's epilogue, Green recounts the challenges and frustrations of teaching a lesson in the social studies class of a New York City public

school. Drawing on her journalism background, she teaches a lesson on biographical writing. Green, who spent a number of hours preparing for her teaching debut, writes that when the time came to lead students in a discussion of the material, "I realized quickly that I was in way over my head."

Green is convinced that what she would need to improve her skills, if she attempted teaching again, is practice—lots of it. After the experience, in which she worked closely with the actual classroom teacher, Green writes that she "relearned" many things, including what is ultimately her book's most important point: that "a person absolutely *can* learn to teach."

New Addition

Books about education—some good, some bad, a few great—are published at a constant rate. Here at the AFT, we want to let educators know what they might find worth reading. Starting with this issue of *American Educator*, "What We're Reading" will appear in these pages. This new feature will highlight books that speak to the challenges classroom teachers face, as well as the joy (yes, joy!) they find in teaching. We hope to provide selections that offer constructive ways educators can improve their instruction and support their students and schools—books that honor their work, respect the profession, and inspire us to reclaim the promise of public education.

—EDITORS