

In the Classroom 124

8 Summer Reading Books to Improve Your Classroom

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Stan Skrabut: Welcome back. Thanks everyone so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. I know you could be doing other things. Probably on this warm day, you probably are doing other things. You're still hanging out with me. It certainly means a lot. I really do appreciate it. Summer is upon us. I can certainly feel it. In most cases, a lot of faculty are off during summer. It's a great time to re-energize in preparation for the fall term. It's also a wonderful opportunity to do some reading as a way to learn new skills and concepts, as well as learn some strategies for getting more time in your life.

I'm all about trying to figure out how to do what I do more efficiently and more effectively for the sole purpose of being able to do it in a relaxed manner and just get more time in my life so I can do other things. Throughout the year, I do a lot of reading. However, this past year has been just a little crazy and it's been really rough on my reading goals. Things are settling down. I've managed to carve out some time to dedicate to reading. I've been sneaking in that time. Today, I want to share what I'm reading as well as provide you with some ideas for your summer reading list.

My personal reading tends to revolve around instructional technology and productivity. What I've learned over the years has helped me become more efficient, more effective, and it is in turned allowed me to pursue other activities, such as writing a book, doing a podcast, lots of other things. What have I been reading? This summer I have a mix of Kindle and print books that are going to keep me occupied. I've increased my reading on Kindle over the past few weeks, mostly in part because I am in a small house, a really small house, and I don't have any room for printed books.

I've also come across Readwise. Readwise, and I've talked about this in a previous episode, lets me capture my Kindle highlights more easily. I'll put those in the show notes because I think you really should check out some of the strategies that I've picked out. To start my summer, I've set aside eight books. As of today, I've already read three of them. I know, probably through the summer, I'll add a lot more books to the list. This is what I've read so far. My reading list is primarily focused on productivity with just a hint of instructional technology. This is what I've been reading. The first is a book called *Bomber Mafia*.

Having served in the Air Force and the Civil Air Patrol, I have always been interested in aviation. I also have an interest in history. I'm really fascinated with World War Two history. *The Bomber Mafia* by Malcolm Gladwell is a mix of these two interests. In this book, Gladwell touches on a number of inventions and concepts that helped

to guide the bombing campaigns in World War Two. He explains why the American and British bombing campaigns differed in Europe and why the Americans changed when they moved to the Pacific. This was definitely a nice diversion to get this summer started. I found it absolutely fascinating.

The next book that I read was a book called *SYSTEMology*. David Jenyns, he asked me to review this book. It's called *SYSTEMology: Create time, reduce errors and scale your profits with proven business systems*. This is definitely a productivity book. *SYSTEMology* looks at the systems that make up a business and breaks them down into repeatable processes. Once you have the processes documented, you can then look for efficiencies, which results in increased savings in time and effort. Also simply documenting the processes will also help with saving time and effort.

During one of the recent department retreats that I had, we examined some of the recommended strategies in the book and used them against some of our library processes. I'm pretty confident that all departments can benefit from the lessons in this book to improve operations. I think it also applies to the classroom. While some aspects, when they start talking about money don't apply, most of them would certainly apply. This afternoon, I finished reading Cal Newport's latest book, *A World Without Email: Reimagining Work in an Age of Communication Overload*. Wonderful book. Absolutely fascinating.

Newport pointed out the obvious, that email asset to our productivity. Everyone knows this. Everyone dreads going into their email. When email initially came out, it was welcomed as a way to streamline operations, make communication a little more easy and fluid. Almost immediately it bogged down business. We can see that to this day. The book is divided into two parts. I've noticed in Cal Newport's writing, he breaks things down into two major parts. In this book, the two parts are the problem and the solutions. The book is well researched.

I especially appreciate the emphasis on how email traffic and the brain work together, or in reality, they don't. I've made a lots of notes that I'm planning to take back to work on Monday and to start implementing them. I think it will help our little operations. I'm going to work to encourage others to pick up some of these principles. This is definitely a book that I would recommend that you read this summer. I will talk a little bit more about it. I want to make sure that you get it on your list. It's going to be part of a trilogy, and the book is *A World Without Email: Reimagining Work in an Age of Communication Overload*. Definitely check it out.

These next two books are written by Ryan Levesque. These books are highly recommended on the podcast that I listen to, and I thought it was a good time to read them and see what I can glean from them. The first one is called *Choose: The Single Most Important Decision Before Starting Your Business*. Based on reading the description in Amazon, because I really didn't know a whole lot about it, only that everybody keeps talking about it, this book provides strategies for selecting the right market, for finding really your right audience.

Even though books like these are not aligned with my day-to-day duties, they do often provide me with ideas and strategies that I can use. I'll be curious what I glean

from this particular book and how it weaves back into the operations that I currently have going on. The other book by Levesque is *Ask: The Counterintuitive Online Formula to Discover Exactly What Your Customers Want to Buy...Create a Mass of Raving Fans...and Take Any Business to the Next Level*. I'm going to hold him to account for this. What I understand from this book, it's a strategy to directly ask your audience what they need and providing tailored solutions.

I can see how this can be useful in my role as an instructional technologist. I'm really curious on what I pick up. This is probably going to be the next book I tackle. I'm looking forward to seeing how I can use it to support my classrooms. The next book on my list is *Rocket Fuel: The One Essential Combination That Will Get You More of What You Want from Your Business*. This is written by Gino Wickman and Mark Winters. Once again, it's another book that is highly touted in the podcast world. It really seems to be about relationships between a visionary and an integrator where the visionary sets the path and the integrator helps to get there.

I'll be curious on how I can put this into action and into my department. Also by Gino Wickman is a book called *Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business*, also highly recommended. Based on the Amazon description, this book appears to focus on a business system. Many of these system books are similar. The message, I believe, is essential and worth implementing. These are things that I do in my operations as an instructional technologist and also director of a library, that we really focus on getting the systems right because then it allows us to do more to help the folks that we serve.

I'm curious on how this book, *Traction*, differs from the other books I read and what I can glean from it. My last of eight books that are on my list is called *Super Courses: The Future of Teaching and Learning* by Ken Bain. I picked this up by listening to the *Teaching in Higher Ed* podcast with Bonni Stachowiak. Bain has visited schools across the United States to identify these super courses. These are high-performing courses based on different research elements that they use. I am confident that I'm going to pick up some strategies that I can share with **[unintelligible 00:08:40]** No doubt I'll probably recommend this book to you in the future.

This is one I'm going to be checking out that really focuses on instruction in the classroom. That's my list. That's what I'm starting this summer with. Now, here's my list for you. While I have lots of recommendations, I have bookshelves full of books that I can certainly recommend, I have narrowed it down to these eight books that I'm going to recommend to you. I've read each of these books. I think you will find them inspirational and useful. The first, I'm going to start with a trilogy from Cal Newport. This trilogy consists of *Deep Work*, *Digital Minimalism*, and *A World Without Email*.

These books focused on improved productivity by removing or controlling distractions so that you can focus on the right things. I recommend that you read them in this order, *Deep Work*, *Digital Minimalism*, and then finally *A World Without Email*. *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World*, has been a focus on a number of podcasts that I've listened to. That's where I get all my books. I listen to podcasts and they recommend these wonderful books. They're successful. Sure, I'll read them. Newport has also appeared in the *Chronicle* review with his

article, *Is Email Making Professors Stupid?* If you do not believe you are producing meaningful work, then you definitely need to read *Deep Work*. It has two major parts, the idea, and the rules. Like I said, Newport breaks his book into two major parts. The idea consists of three chapters which focus on the essence of deep work. There's also four rules for making deep work possible. The idea, Newport highlighted the importance of working distraction-free as a way to increase productivity. If you don't have distractions, you can focus on your work. Makes a lot of sense to me. Network tools distribute to distractions, or as Newport defined it shallow work.

Shallow work adds very little benefit to society. On the other hand, deep work requires a greater cognitive effort and leads to substantial improvement that's difficult to replicate. He shares these four rules or four ideas that you should be focused on working deeply. With each one of these, he gives a lot of detail. I like his writing style. The first one is work deeply, embrace boredom, quit social media, and drain the shallows. Newport also stresses the importance of developing habits and rituals to help find time and focus to work deeply. He shared different scheduling options that can be used for deep work.

He emphasized that it's up to the individual to find a system network. I do this in my work when I have my calendar. I live and die by the calendar. Basically, individuals have the capability of getting on my calendar to have meetings except for tomorrow. Tomorrow because no one got on it, I control it. All the empty pockets of time I blocked out for my deep work opportunities. Then by the end of the day, tomorrow, by the end of the day, if no one grabbed my Tuesday calendar, I'm going to block it out for me. These are ways that I can control this deep work and not be distracted all the time people just jumping on and suddenly wanting a meeting.

Wonderful book. Definitely check it out. Have you been more tired, irritable, and distracted than years past? It could be that you're a slave to your digital devices and their applications. Social media companies like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter are aggressively trying to capture your attention and they're using brain science against you. Technology can be a very powerful tool. However, it can also be destructive if used for a manipulative purposes. We are in a time where social media is being used to control our attention at the detriment of other activities. This comes from this book, *Digital Minimalism*.

In the second part of the book, Newport focuses on four practices, spend time alone, don't click like, that just reinforces the connection between your brain and social media, do not click like, reclaim leisure and join the attention resistance. He offers a number of strategies, primarily spend time alone. All these strategies seem to emphasize one thing, leave the phone behind. When you go out to eat, leave your phone at home. When you go out for a walk, leave your phone behind. He recommends taking long walks in order to just let the brain, let that gray matter slosh chemicals around to help with ideas. Another good book.

Now, the third of the trilogy is *A World Without Email*, which I just told you a little bit about. Email is the devil. It is somebody else's to-do list. It's not your to-do list. The sooner that you can move away from email, the more productive that you'll become. He uses studies or examples in his book. For example, setting up a meeting. How

many emails does it take to set up a meeting? It is crazy how much time that you are devoting, how much distraction you're devoting to setting up a meeting. He provides ways that you could do this much better. It is not a matter of looking busy at work. Anyone can look busy.

It's a matter of doing the work that will have a purpose and finding ways to reduce email. That is the key. The next couple books come from James Lang. He's a prolific author and scholar who puts into practice what he researches and then he shares what he has learned. I like reading what James Lange shares. It is basically books that had I written these things down. If I wrote down all the recommendations I've shared with faculty, I would have probably written these book. He got there first. The first book I want to share is called *Cheating Lessons: Learning from Academic Dishonesty*.

A lot of faculty are fretting over cheating in the classroom, especially when we went online. It is a real problem. When you've got 77% of students saying that they've cheated in a class before, then, yes, you have a problem. James Lang explores this issue in-depth rather than struggling the arms race between cheaters and faculty because cheaters will always find a way to cheat. What you need to do is apply a better course design. Just as better course design reduces accommodations in the classroom, better course design also reduces cheating. Cheating takes place because the opportunity exists.

If you reduce or if you develop better courses, you're going to end up reducing cheating. Lots of great ideas in this particular book. Definitely a book that I think all faculty should read. The other book that I think all faculty should read is also by James Lang, it's called *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning*. It takes a look at the research into cognitive theories. Many of the strategies that I have shared through this podcast, I can find those in those books. For example, retrieval practices, the strategies that you would use to help students remember, the essential information of your classes.

In each of the chapters, he shares techniques that can be easily adopted in your classroom. The book focuses on three main areas, improving knowledge work, improving understanding, and supporting inspiration. I took copious notes while reading this book. The book ties in closely with Universal Design for Learning. Definitely a book that I would put on a shelf. If you have not read this book yet, I strongly encourage you to go out and do it. One of my favorite productivity strategies is called OKRs, Objectives, and Key Results. John Doerr shared this strategy with Google when they were just forming. In the end, they turned out okay.

They still use this strategy to manage their company. In the book *Measure What Matters: How Google, Bono, and the Gates Foundation Rock the World with OKRs*, Doerr shared stories about how OKRs were introduced to different people in organization, how they implement them, and what the results were. Doerr details four key features of the OKR concept, which are a focus and commitment to priorities, align and connect for teamwork, track for accountability, and stretch for amazing. The thing I like about OKRs is that their shortened duration.

A normal OKR cycle is typically one quarter or we have adjusted it to the academic cycle, the fall term, the spring term, and the summer term. With my teams, we've managed to get a lot done because we're really focused on these very specific objectives to help take us to the next level. One of the missing pieces that I appreciate from Doerr's book was how to implement OKRs across the team. He focused on tips for continuous performance management in the form of conversations, feedback, and recognition. I use OKRs for my personal life. I use OKRs as part of my work.

I believe that I've been able to level up in a lot of areas because of OKRs. Definitely a strong recommend there. My seventh book for you is called *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School* by John Medina. Definitely an interesting book. John Medina is a molecular biologist who shares his love and understanding of science with how the brain works. In this book, there's countless lessons explaining how to use this knowledge to improve the classroom. He touches on the importance of sleep, exercise, stress, vision, repetition, so many different topics.

Just understanding how the brain does certain things, you can see how you can make modifications to your classroom to get the most out of your students. The last book I want to recommend is called *Rehumanize Your Business*. Very simply, including videos in some of your email messages will increase clarity and increase impact. I have been using video in my messages for a while. Ethan Beute and Stephen Pacinelli's book *Rehumanize Your Business: How Personal Videos Accelerate Sales and Improve Customer Experience* drove the lesson home for me.

Basically, you're humanizing what you're doing and this is especially apt for the classroom. Another recommended book. Quick read. It drives the importance of why you should be using more video in your classroom in different ways of doing it. That is my list for you. Let me know what your thoughts are in the comments. Please share. I am sure that you will gain some ideas that will take you to the next level. With that list of eight books, I have one more. Here is a quick plug for my book.