Marshall Memo 920

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
January 24, 2022

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Quotes of the Week

"Children don't need anyone to give them a sense of wonder; they already have that. But they do need a way to incorporate the various bits and pieces of knowledge they acquire into some logical picture of the world. For me, science provides the most elegant and satisfying way to construct this picture."

Steve Jenkins, children's book author and illustrator, who died last week at 69, quoted in a *New York Times* obituary by Penelope Green, January 20, 2022

"Early writing development predicts later reading and writing achievement."

Hope Gerde, Tanya Wright, and Gary Bingham (see item #5)

"For the millions of students who struggle to read at grade level, every school day can bring feelings of anxiety, frustration, and shame."

Madeline Will (see item #6)

"Low tech, high text. Phones away, books out. Attention is the driver of learning. You wire or rewire your brain through how you use it. The ability to sustain your focus, to key into the signal and ignore the noise is built by habit. Every time phones are out, you are practicing fracturing your or your students' attention, making half-attention the normal state. Read and read and read. In hard copy only. Write and write and write. Pencil to paper."

Doug Lemov (see item #4)

"Curriculum has been the most overlooked factor in the struggle for higher achievement. High-quality, knowledge-rich curriculum is key. It has to be carefully designed and include rich but adaptable daily lesson plans. And it has to understand what the cognitive science tells us: Facts and higher-order thinking are not opposites. You can only think deeply about that which you know a great deal about."

Doug Lemov (*ibid*.)

"Having a 12th grader who is reading at a 3rd-grade level read *The Grapes of Wrath* is not offering them rigor. That's just too hard. But having a 12th grader who's reading at a 4th-grade level read *Lord of the Flies*, which is typically a 6th-grade book, that can be rigorous. They can do it if they have a lot of guidance, a lot of love, and a lot of support. But they have got to believe that they matter, you see them, and they are worthy."

José Luis Navarro, quoted in "Equity at Every Level" by Sonia Caus Gleason in *The Learning Professional*, December 2021 (Vol. 42, #6, pp. 46-49); Navarro can be reached at j.navarro@birminghamcharter.com.

"Your kids are doing better than mine; what are you doing?"

Karin Chenoweth on the most important educator-to-educator question (see item #1)

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1. Karin Chenoweth on the Most Powerful Question in Education

In this article in *The Learning Professional*, author/researcher Karin Chenoweth (The Education Trust) describes the turnaround of a rural Oklahoma district that had been mired in dysfunction and low achievement. A couple of years into his tenure as superintendent, Roland Smith noticed that a nearby district with similar demographics had some of the best student results in the state. Skeptical at first (were teachers cooking the test scores?), Smith visited the district, was impressed by what he saw, and sent teams of teachers to take a closer look. Here's some of what they saw:

- 3-year-olds learning nursery rhymes and songs and forming letter sounds;
- 4-year-olds mapping sounds onto letters;
- Kindergarten students reading within nine weeks of the beginning of the school year;
- First graders reading and writing about stories;
- Second graders writing about the same topic from a fiction and nonfiction perspective;
- Systematic instruction in rich vocabulary and background knowledge.

As a former high-school science teacher and principal, Smith hadn't understood the importance of the primary grades; he'd been thinking of kindergarten teachers almost as babysitters.

Now he understood. He hired a reading consultant and began a turnaround process that imported ideas from the neighboring district and also identified and showcased effective teachers within their own district. Student achievement steadily improved, and within a few years the district won an A on the Oklahoma State Report Card. The superintendent threw a party in the high-school gym and played Cyndi Lauper's "True Colors."

Chenoweth believes the key to this success story, and others documented on the Education Trust's Dispelling the Myth website, is a humble educator-to-educator question: *Your kids are doing better than mine; what are you doing?* The question might be heard in an

informal teacher-to-teacher chat, in a team meeting looking at the results of a common assessment, or between two principals. Important as the question is, Chenoweth says she doesn't hear it often enough. That's because four prerequisites need to be in place:

• *A belief that all children can learn at high levels, and a willingness to take responsibility for figuring out how to get them there* – With this belief in place, educators put aside rationalizations like, *These kids aren't motivated. They don't try hard. Their families don't help*, replacing them with questions like, *What more can we do to engage and motivate our students? If our families are too stressed to provide homework help, what can we do to make sure students still get the benefits of outside-classroom work?*

• *An ability to take a step back and objectively assess results* – "To be able to see that the students in another classroom, school, district, or state are doing better than your own," says Chenoweth, "requires developing professional distance and judgment and stamping out the natural defensiveness that comes when you are working hard and not getting the results you wanted."

• *Detailed information on students' progress* – This might be from a common assessment given to all the students in one grade level or course, or information on schoolwide or district-wide attendance, suspensions, and college attendance. To be useful, it's necessary to break down the data by individual teacher and by students' gender, SES, and race. Averages and aggregate scores can be deceptive, says Chenoweth; for example, a district might celebrate the fact that 80 percent of students were proficient, beating the statewide average of 75 percent, but a closer look might reveal that 90 percent of girls and 70 percent of boys were proficient, or that certain teachers were especially successful at boosting the achievement of African-American students – crucial information to drive continuous improvement.

• *A culture of trust* – A teacher needs to know, says Chenoweth, that admitting disappointing results to colleagues "will be met with help, advice, and time to observe other classrooms rather than criticism and shame." This positive dynamic will occur only when there are shared learning goals, common assessments, time to meet, and an agreed-upon way of talking about students' learning.

"One Simple Question Can Accelerate Progress Toward Equity" by Karin Chenoweth in *The Learning Professional*, December 2021 (Vol. 42, #6, pp. 50-52, 55); Chenoweth can be reached at kchenoweth@edtrust.org.

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2. Professional Learning Coupled with Quality Curriculum Materials

"Most teachers have never experienced the sort of inquiry-based learning we expect them to provide for their students," say Jim Short and Stephanie Hirsch in this Carnegie Corporation paper. Most teacher training and professional development is generic, preparing teachers to plan lessons and keep students engaged – "a razzle-dazzle update to traditional stand-and-deliver instruction." This is not helpful in getting teachers to shift from the traditional classrooms they themselves experienced to getting their students more involved and learning key content and skills at a deeper level.

Short and Hirsch's theory of action is that when high-quality professional learning goes hand in hand with the implementation of first-rate curriculum materials, teachers' and students' learning will dramatically improve. What is high-quality PD? The authors present their findings in a chart reminiscent of the periodic table of elements:

- Core design features: curriculum, transformational learning, equity.
- Functional design features shaping teachers' experiences: learning designs, beliefs, reflection and feedback, and change management.
- Structural design features describing parameters and settings: collective participation, models, and effective use of time.
- The essentials: leadership, resources, and coherence.

(See the link below for full details on these elements.)

And what are the characteristics of high-quality curriculum materials? Specific learning goals aligned with up-to-date academic standards; a coherent sequence; lessons aligned to content standards; student-centered approaches to inquiry-based learning; research-based teaching strategies; teacher support materials; and embedded assessments to guide instruction.

As exemplars of this model of professional learning, Short and Hirsch showcase several schools and districts that are coupling PD with a high-quality curriculum program:

• EL Education's language arts curriculum implemented in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina.

• Eureka Mathematics implemented in Gladstone Elementary School, Kansas City, Missouri, working with Instruction Partners.

• Louisiana ELA Guidebooks English language arts curriculum implemented in Lafayette Parish Schools, Louisiana, working with Teaching Lab.

• OpenSciEd science curriculum implemented in the Rafael Hernández Two-Way Bilingual School and other Boston Public Schools.

• Wit and Wisdom ELA curriculum implemented in Baltimore City Public Schools with The New Teacher Center.

• Illustrative Mathematics implemented in Sunnyside Unified School District, Tucson, Arizona.

"This vision of professional learning uses curriculum as both a lever and a guide," conclude Short and Hirsch, "helping link teachers' actions and ideas to new standards in a concrete, focused way. Done right, it can close the gap between the experiences we provide for teachers and those we want them to provide for students… Working together, teachers rehearse lessons and address common concerns. They deepen their subject knowledge and fine-tune their instructional approaches, growing fluent in the curriculum's rigorous content and sequence of learning… These experiences help reshape their beliefs and assumptions about what their students can achieve."

"The Elements: Transforming Teaching Through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning" by Jim Short and Stephanie Hirsch, a Challenge Paper from Carnegie Corporation of New York, November 2020

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3. Building Students' Skills at Recognizing and Countering Misinformation

In this article in *American Educator*, John Cook (Monash University, Australia) says misinformation about climate change affects different people differently: with political conservatives, it tends to be persuasive; for liberals, it has little impact. "This means that as misinformation washes over society, it splits the public further apart, exacerbating an already partisan populace. Misinformation polarizes." Even a few cherry-picked pieces of mythology feed skepticism about what's happening to the planet – and they undermine faith in scientists and scientific findings.

"Misinformation doesn't have to be coherent or based on evidence to have an impact," says Cook. "Just by existing, it can cancel out our efforts to communicate accurate facts." For example, people can be told that 97 percent of climate scientists agree that climate change is the result of human activity, but many are thrown off when presented with the Global Warming Petition Project, which has 31,000 scientists' signatures agreeing that humans aren't disrupting the climate.

What are educators to do? Teaching the facts is necessary but not sufficient, says Cook. Students need metacognitive strategies to navigate these turbulent seas. One approach is to explain the techniques used by purveyors of misinformation; this can give students the skills to make accurate judgments on important issues. It's analogous to vaccinations, many of which introduce a small dose of the illness to build the immune system's resistance. "By exposing people to a weakened form of misinformation," says Cook, "they can develop 'cognitive antibodies' or 'immunity' against the misinformation."

The vaccination approach has two elements: first, warning students of the threat of being misled, which puts them on guard against misleading persuasion (nobody likes being misled); second, providing counterarguments explaining how the misinformation is wrong. With the Global Warming Petition, students are alerted to the fact that it's intended to mislead, then shown that, while 31,000 sounds like a lot of people, fewer than 1 percent have expertise in climate science. Being exposed to this argument has the added benefit of putting people on guard against fake experts – a common tactic used by misinformationists.

Cook has studied two kinds of inoculation – fact based and logic based. The first explains how a piece of misinformation is false or misleading – for example, it's argued that emitting carbon dioxide isn't a problem because it's good for plants. The fact-based counterargument is that while plants need carbon dioxide, they also need water and a comfortable temperature range, and climate change disrupts both of those conditions. Researchers have found that with fact-based arguments, it's important for the factual information to be presented *after* the misinformation; if misinformation has the last word, it tends to cancel out the facts.

A logic-based argument against the carbon-dioxide-is-plant-food misinformation is to show that it's an oversimplification: by focusing on a single factor (plants need carbon dioxide), we're ignoring the other things plants need to grow. It's like arguing that because we need calcium, ice cream is all we need to eat. Logic-based arguments are important because

fact-based arguments are vulnerable to misinformation; adding a logic-based argument is "like shielding our factual explanations with protective bubble wrap as we send them out into a cold, hard world," says Cook. The best strategy is combining a fact-based and logic-based argument: "explain the facts, introduce the myth, and then reconcile the conflict between the two by explaining the myth's fallacy."

The ice cream analogy is an example of *parallel argumentation*, a strategy that can be especially effective with students. Using humor is also helpful; see the cartoons in the full article linked below.

Cook uses the FLICC acronym to summarize five categories of intentional misinformation; here are some examples for each one:

- *Fake experts* – a magnified minority, a fake debate;
- *Logical fallacies* – slippery slope, ambiguity, straw man, ad hominem, misrepresentation, oversimplification, false choice, single cause, red herring, false equivalence, apples versus oranges, false balance;
- *Impossible expectations* – moving goalposts, lowered expectations, anchoring;
- *Cherry picking* – arguing by anecdote, quote mining, wishful thinking;
- *Conspiracy theories* – overriding suspicion, nefarious intent, something must be wrong, persecuted victim, immune to evidence, re-interpreting randomness.

For more details on FLICC components, see this link.

Cook says an effective way to apply these insights in the classroom is *refutational teaching* – anticipating misconceptions and building counterarguments into a curriculum unit. For example, a common myth about climate change is that the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by humans – about 30 billion metric tons a year – is small compared to the 700 billion metric tons emitted by nature each year. This argument ignores the fact that natural emissions (for example, leaves falling and decomposing in the fall) are balanced by the absorption of carbon dioxide by growing leaves in the spring and summer. "By directly addressing the myth," says Cook, "we not only address a misconception about the carbon cycle but also deepen our understanding of how human activity has disrupted the natural balance."

Studies have shown that refutational teaching is more effective than standard lessons; it's more engaging, concepts last longer in students' minds, and there's the added benefit that teaching about misconceptions introduces "appropriate humility," says Cook. "Unfounded confidence can be a roadblock to learning, and misconception-based learning reduces that barrier." Cook and his colleagues have been working on developing curriculum materials along this line – see this link for several units.

Another classroom approach is learning the techniques of misinformation by actively employing them: students role-play, purposely attempting to include misleading techniques in their writing, and use digital games. Preliminary data from one digital simulation – The Bad News Game – shows that students who have played the game are better able to assess the reliability of online information sources and Twitter posts.

Cook has been working on another game that teaches students how to spot misleading arguments they might hear from a cantankerous relative. The Cranky Uncle Game (available

free here) is designed to build resilience against techniques of science denial – in a fun and humorous context. The goal is to become a science-denying person by learning a range of misleading rhetorical tricks used to reject the conclusions of the scientific community – while other players compete to spot what's misleading. Critical thinking is *hard*, says Cook. "Our brains are hardwired to make fast, snap decisions rather than slowly reason through problems." But critical thinking gets faster and easier when students engage in repeated practice and gradually master expert heuristics.

This happens in the same way that beginning drivers learn to perform a complex series of tasks – signaling, checking mirrors, accelerating, steering, watching for pedestrians, anticipating other drivers' actions, braking, parking – so they can do an errand as if on automatic pilot. Preliminary data indicate that the Cranky Uncle Game helps improve students' critical thinking skills.

"Misinformation is an immense societal problem," Cook concludes, and he advocates harnessing science, technology, and the arts to address it: "Science provides evidence-based approaches to addressing misinformation, such as logic-based inoculation. Art can help package educational material in engaging, memorable formats. Technology allows the development of games that are both interactive and scalable."

"Teaching About Our Climate Crisis" by John Cook in *American Educator*, Winter 2021-22 (Vol. 45, #4, pp. 12-19, 40); Cook can be reached at John.Cook@monash.edu; for more on this topic, see The Debunking Handbook 2020, of which Cook is a co-author.

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4. Doug Lemov on the Keys to a Champion Classroom

In this *Education Week* interview by Rick Hess, author/educator Doug Lemov talks about the just-published 3.0 edition of *Teach Like a Champion*. Some direct quotes from the interview:

• The number of schools that offer radically better classroom learning environments – orderly, productive, happy, challenging, scholarly – has increased significantly in a lot of communities [over the last decade]. That gives us more models to study and more evidence that exceptional classrooms are possible.

• The proliferation of technology, especially smartphones and social media…affects students both directly – by degrading their attentional skills, for example – and indirectly – by crowding books out of students' lives.

• Low tech, high text. Phones away, books out. Attention is the driver of learning. You wire or rewire your brain through how you use it. The ability to sustain your focus, to key into the signal and ignore the noise is built by habit. Every time phones are out, you are practicing fracturing your or your students' attention, making half-attention the normal state. Read and read and read. In hard copy only. Write and write and write. Pencil to paper.

• To create the highest-quality learning environments for young people, teachers have to actively shape the learning environment and sometimes the social fabric of daily interaction.

Yes, that requires teachers to ask students to do what may at first seem unnatural. But the benefits massively outweigh the costs.

• To love young people is to give them classrooms that build these habits [self-discipline, self-regulation, hard work, and patience]. You want to speak but you learn to listen first; you are tired some days but complete your tasks regardless. And in the end, those are the steppingstones of greatness. But in lieu of that, we've somehow accepted a Hollywood vision where success flicks on like a switch on a journey of self-discovery. I'm going to do everything I can to build schools that offer something better.

• Curriculum has been the most overlooked factor in the struggle for higher achievement. High-quality, knowledge-rich curriculum is key. It has to be carefully designed and include rich but adaptable daily lesson plans. And it has to understand what the cognitive science tells us: Facts and higher-order thinking are not opposites. You can only think deeply about that which you know a great deal about.

"What It Means to 'Teach Like a Champion' in 2022" by Rick Hess in *Education Week*, January 18, 2022

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5. Encouraging Early Writing in Preschool

"Writing gives children a way to share their voices and ideas with the world," say Hope Gerde (Texas A&M University), Tanya Wright (Michigan State University), and Gary Bingham (Georgia State University) in this *American Educator* article. However, they say, "Recent research indicates that most preschools could offer far more opportunities for children to write for communication." This may be because many early educators see writing as primarily about spelling and handwriting and believe preschool is too early for that. By broadening the definition to include sharing ideas in prewriting scribbles and drawings, preschools can enhance literacy development while children engage in other activities.

Getting ideas into written form is a complex challenge for children between 3 and 5, say Gerde, Wright, and Bingham. They need to formulate and remember what they're trying to say and figure out how to get it down on paper. Many educators and parents are aware of these difficulties and dial back their expectations. But there's a middle ground. Children can learn the importance of communicating ideas through prewriting text and images. For example, a boy talks with his teacher as he scribbles and draws a message to his classmates, "Pretty music today, listen or play." His teacher echoes the message, reinforcing the relationship between verbal and his emerging written language.

Children can also begin to learn how text works, including foundational concepts like letter-sound relationships. A girl draws a circle and works on writing the word STOP, getting as far as the letter and sound S. Long before they master letters and sounds, preschoolers should be encouraged to make writing attempts that provide insights about where they are with print concepts, phonological awareness, and how writing can be used for different purposes.

Gerde, Wright, and Bingham have several suggestions for preschool educators and parents to build the bridge from prewriting to writing:

• *Provide and draw attention to writing materials and resources*. For example, crayons, pencils, markers, chalk, paper, dry-erase boards, chalkboards, clipboards, paper, and alphabet charts in a dedicated writing area, and lots of encouragement to use them in a variety of ways, perhaps in a pretend restaurant.

• *Accept and encourage writing attempts*. "Children's early writing attempts, including scribbles or letter-like forms, lay an important foundation for writing letters," say the authors. "When teachers encourage any form of writing, they show that children's ideas are valued and help children to see themselves as writers, to participate in writing before they have well-developed motor or spelling skills, and to understand the connection between oral language and print."

• *Connect writing to thematic units and children's play*. The curriculum, children's books, and other classroom activities are opportunities to get children "writing" to share information, describe what's happening with classroom pets, give directions, or convince classmates about something important.

• *Provide multiple ways for children to participate in interactive writing*. "Sharing the pen" is an effective way to elicit children's ideas and transcribe them on an easel sheet in real time. "To expand the experience," say the authors, "the teacher can ask questions while they write together to encourage the child to add more details. To enhance vocabulary, teachers can offer new or alternative word selections."

• *Observe children's writing to inform instruction*. A child who writes Mom at the top of a page, draws a heart in the middle, and signs her name at the bottom knows something about writing a letter. A child who scribbles on a notepad taking an order from a "customer" in the pretend restaurant recognizes that language can be recorded and print has meaning. These and other observations inform a teacher's curriculum planning for children who are at many places on the developmental continuum.

All this really matters, say the authors, because "Early writing development predicts later reading and writing achievement."

"Sharing Their Ideas with the World" by Hope Gerde, Tanya Wright, and Gary Bingham in *American Educator*, Winter 2021-22 (Vol. 45, #4, pp. 34-38, 40); the authors can be reached at hgerde@tamu.edu, tswright@msu.edu, and gbingham@gsu.edu.

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6. Supporting Students Who Are Behind in Reading

"For the millions of students who struggle to read at grade level, every school day can bring feelings of anxiety, frustration, and shame," says Madeline Will in this *Education Week* article. By the upper-elementary grades, reading is so important across the curriculum that low proficiency makes school success extremely difficult. This can result in what psychiatrist Donald Nathanson calls the "compass of shame"; students:

- Attack themselves with verbal put-downs, sometimes self-harm;
- Attack others, lashing out at classmates or teachers;
- Withdraw, avoiding participation in class or skipping classes or school;

- Act out.

What these students need may be a dose of systematic phonics so they can decode words, or vocabulary, background knowledge, and oral language skills so they can make sense of what they're reading. Unfortunately most struggling students are so deep in shame and self-doubt that they don't ask for help.

Will summarizes some of the do's and don'ts for supporting students whose reading skills are underdeveloped:

- Build a classroom culture where it's okay to make mistakes and not okay to snicker at a poor reader.
- Don't assume that disengagement means a student is lazy or doesn't care.
- Don't assume struggling students can't understand grade-level content.
- Provide scaffolding and support so students can access grade-level content.
- Weave students' interests and strengths into reading lessons.
- Give struggling readers books that are interesting and age-appropriate.
- Group low readers with more-proficient students some of the time.
- Don't require below-level students to read aloud in front of their peers.

"What Teachers Can Do to Help Struggle Readers Who Feel Ashamed" by Madeline Will in *Education Week*, January 4, 2022

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7. Short Item:

Ed Tech Tools – In her latest *Cult of Pedagogy* article, Jennifer Gonzalez joins with Brandie Wright and Kim Darche to endorse and provide details on six educational technology tools: Frame, Google Arts and Culture Experiments, #1000 Black Girl Books, Osmo, Everfi, and Skew the Script.

"6 Ed Tech Tools to Try in 2022" by Jennifer Gonzalez in *Cult of Pedagogy*, January 18, 2022

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
please e-mail kim.marshall48@gmail.com

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 52 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than 150 articles each week, and selects 8-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD Express
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education