Marshall Memo 937

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
May 23, 2022

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Quotes of the Week

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

U.S. Army General George Patton (quoted in item #1)

"If we teach kids to swim, they can transfer that skill from the local pool to a larger body of water. We can't assume, however, that teaching young children to master the big five reading skills will prepare them to understand *and learn from* all of the different sorts of books and articles they will encounter as they move through school – on standardized reading tests and beyond."

James Kim and Mary Burkhauser (see item #3)

"Many students remain stuck in the shallow end of the middle- and high-school curriculum – wading through low-level academic and career-pathway courses with many links to low-paying careers or jobs that simply no longer exist."

Gene Bottoms in "How to Transform High School? Let Academics and Career Skills Join Forces" in *Educational Leadership*, May 2022 (Vol. 79, #8, pp. 31-37); Bottoms can be reached at gbottoms25@gmail.com.

"The college-for-all movement has led us to skip the crucial steps of engaging students in thoughtful conversations about who they are as people, where their interests lie, and how a postsecondary institution can help them get where they want to go."

Jeremy Greenfield (see item #4)

"The bulk of a librarian's job is to know what is new and exciting in children's literature, to connect readers with authors and good books, and to support them in continuing to grow as readers."

Julia Torres, Denver teacher librarian in "Powerful Partnerships" in *Literacy Today*, April/May/June 2022 (Vol. 39, #4, pp. 27-29); Torres is at julia_torres@dpsk12.net.

1. How to Be a Hands-On Boss Without Micromanaging

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Colin Fisher (University College London), Teresa Amabile (Harvard Business School), and Julianna Pillemer (New York University) explore the sweet spot between overmanaging and giving too much autonomy. "Research shows that people have strong negative emotional and physiological reactions to unnecessary or unwanted help," say the authors, "and that it can erode interpersonal relationships." U.S. Army General George Patton famously said, "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

On the other hand, research shows that being too laissez-faire is a problem. Is there an effective middle ground? Fisher, Amabile, and Pillemer studied two companies to see how leaders can support their teams without undermining their sense of efficacy and independence. For starters, they identified these baseline conditions:

- Employees know the boss is willing to help.
- They feel comfortable asking for support.
- Leaders have a good understanding of the work.
- They are willing to devote time and energy when necessary.

With those in place, the authors identified three key strategies that successfully straddled micromanagement and laissez-faire:

• *Timing* – Trying to anticipate and preempt problems before they arise is not the best approach. The most effective managers watch and listen until they see that an employee has a challenging situation: "They understand," say Fisher, Amabile, and Pillemer, "that people are more willing to welcome assistance when they're already engaged in a task or a project and have experienced its challenges firsthand; in many cases, a well-timed cure may be better than that ounce of prevention… Offering preemptive advice can keep people from seeing its value."

• *Psychological safety* – "When bosses step in, their involvement can imply that people are messing up in a big way," say the authors. "That's why employees often hide or downplay issues and fail to solicit guidance." It has to be clear that the leader is getting involved not to judge and evaluate but to support the best work, which necessarily involves risk-taking and mistakes. When the boss is seen as an adviser and helper, the employee is much more likely to accept and learn from support.

• *Going deep when necessary* – With thorny problems that can't be resolved with quick advice, a boss may need to provide intensive guidance, and that means taking the time to understand the issue and provide in-depth support. Handled well, it will be "heartily received," say the authors, and not seen as micromanagement.

• *Path-clearing* – A team may be understaffed or encounter a short-term problem, and the boss can help by stopping in and looking for small ways to provide relief – perhaps ordering lunch during a long work session. "Leaders trying this approach shouldn't underestimate the importance of staying informed about the work," say Fisher, Amabile, and Pillemer. "Those who fail to do so can provide only shallow criticism or vague advice when they drop in."

"How to Help (Without Micromanaging)" by Colin Fisher, Teresa Amabile, and Julianna Pillemer in *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2021); Fisher can be reached at colin.fisher@ucl.ac.uk, Pillemer at jp3532@stern.nyu.edu.

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2. Helping Students Become Flexible, Sophisticated Thinkers

(Originally titled "5 IDEAS for Developing Real-World Thinking Skills")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, author/consultants Harvey Silver, Abigail Boutz, and Jay McTighe say that five thinking skills are essential to grappling with the modern world's complex problems (acronym IDEAS):

• *Inquiry* – Thoughtful questions drive an investigative process that seeks to explain and understand. Inquiry involves analyzing documents and data, generating models, and conducting experiments.

• *Design* – An iterative process produces a new way of solving a problem, addressing a need, or improving an existing product or way of doing things. Designers describe a need, generate possible solutions, test options, and plan for implementation.

• *Evaluation* – Appropriate criteria are used to assess a product (for example, the strength of a bridge), an outcome (how the stock market did), or a process (did a group collaborate well?).

• *Argumentation* – This involves making a claim or critique and justifying it with reasons and evidence.

• *Systems analysis* – Changes in one or more parts of a system may produce short- and long-term consequences.

These are the very skills that have been used during the Covid-19 pandemic: scientists *inquired* about the origins and mode of virus transmission; the pharmaceutical industry *designed* vaccines; government officials *evaluated* different strategies for reducing the risk of infection; everyone *argued* about which to prioritize; and *system analysis* is being used to address supply-chain issues.

Silver, Boutz, and McTighe believe the goal of K-12 education is to develop "sophisticated thinkers and learners who understand content deeply and can transfer their knowledge and skills to real-world challenges." But even in schools committed to project-based learning, they say, there's not nearly enough practice with the IDEAS thinking skills. They give examples of tasks that focus on authentic issues, are engaging and relevant, and require deep thinking and transfer of knowledge:

- A secondary social studies *inquiry* task – How did a ragtag colonial militia with limited financial support defeat Great Britain, at that time the world's most powerful nation?
- A high-school psychology *design* task – After studying the behavioral and intellectual development of toddlers, create a safe educational toy that will appeal to toddlers and help them develop attention, memory, reasoning, imagination, and curiosity.
- A secondary ELA *evaluation* task – Examine three options for a complete 10th-grade reading list, make a recommendation, and explain your thinking.
- A primary-grade health *argument* task – Use insights from sleep research to advise your parents on how to respond to your sister's argument that bedtimes are silly and she should be able to stay up as late as she wants.
- An elementary science *systems analysis* task – Research an endangered tropical animal and create a children's picture book that explains the rainforest ecosystem and predicts what might happen if the animal became extinct.

This link provides additional task starters and guiding questions for the five skills.

"5 IDEAS for Developing Real-World Thinking Skills" by Harvey Silver, Abigail Boutz, and Jay McTighe in *Educational Leadership*, May 2022 (Vol. 79, #8, pp. 38-42); the authors can be reached at hsilver@thoughtfulclassroom.com, aboutz@thoughtfulclassroom.com, and jay@mctighe-associates.com.

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3. Coherent Background Knowledge as a Key to Reading Improvement

In this *Phi Delta Kappan* article, James Kim and Mary Burkhauser (Harvard University) cite troubling evidence that reading comprehension has not improved in recent years; in 2019, only about one-third of U.S. fourth graders were reading at the proficient level, and the pandemic has made things worse. "Yet despite the agreement that something must be done to improve young children's reading comprehension," say Kim and Burkhauser, "even the best minds in our country are struggling to figure out how to actually move the needle on student outcomes." A 2020 Institute of Education Sciences study of six reading interventions found that none of them produced gains in students' standardized test scores.

Since the National Reading Panel's influential 2000 report, most schools have focused on the "big five" reading skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The theory was that if students mastered these skills, they'd be able to apply them to a variety of texts – and to standardized tests. The problem, say Kim and Burkhauser (citing Hugh Cats), is that reading isn't like swimming: "If we teach kids to swim, they can transfer that skill from the local pool to a larger body of water. We can't assume, however, that teaching young children to master the big five reading skills will prepare them to understand *and learn from* all of the different sorts of books and articles they will encounter as they move through school – on standardized reading tests and beyond."

Why? Because in addition to basic reading skills, kids also need background knowledge to understand new texts. Consider this passage:

> Kallis and Rhodes put on 84 but, with the ball turning, Mark Waugh could not hit with impunity and his eight overs cost only 37. The runs still had to be scored at more than seven an over, with McGrath still to return and Warne having two overs left, when Rhodes pulled Reiffel to Beven at deep square leg.

If you know about the game of cricket, you'll be able to understand this passage; if you don't, you may be able to read the words but it won't make sense. "This is what makes reading comprehension so hard," say Kim and Burkhauser, "– to understand what you are reading, you must have some amount of background knowledge about the topic already, and to learn from what you are reading, you must be able to integrate any new understanding with that prior knowledge."

This is not a new insight, say the authors, but they believe the usual advice – beef up science, social studies, music, and art – is not enough: "Educators need to consider how topics across their curricula relate to one another. They then need to help students create meaningful connections across those topics and teach students how to tap into relevant knowledge while reading."

Kim and Burkhauser urge teachers to be more systematic about developing *schemas* – intellectual frameworks for organizing knowledge in students' minds, analogous to trees with branches and leaves. With the passage about cricket, the trunk of the tree is basic knowledge about how team sports work, with branches for different sports – football, baseball, soccer. The leaves on each branch are the words a student might already know about some of those sports. Reading the unfamiliar passage about cricket, a student might use prior knowledge of certain words – *ball, hit, cost, runs* – to make connections to other branches on the schema of team sports and begin to grow a tiny new branch about cricket – which would grow more robust with other readings or experiences with the sport.

The implication, say Kim and Burkhauser: "We should rethink how reading comprehension is taught in school and what the teacher's role should be. If schemas are like trees, requiring time and the right conditions to grow, the teacher's job is to cultivate the conditions that help children grow schemas. Thus, the question becomes, how can we teach for transfer so that children can organize facts, concepts, and related words into usable knowledge."

The authors have developed an intervention, dubbed Model of Reading Engagement (MORE), to build background knowledge in thematic science and social studies units in grade 1-3. Here are the key steps for teachers:

• *Develop thematic units that build schemas*. Choose a few schemas and have students read texts on concepts branching out from them. For example, a scientific study of the natural world uses texts that frequently address *habitat, adaptation, survival, evidence,* and *theory*. The study of Arctic animals in first grade leads to second grade topics on dinosaurs' extinction. "The more students encounter these essential words and concepts and have opportunities to use them in discussion and/or writing, the stronger the trunk," say Kim and Burkhauser, "i.e., the

more they can rely on this schema to help them organize, remember, and apply what they learn about new, but related, topics."

• *Help students connect new knowledge to existing schemas*. For example, second graders listen to a readaloud of a book about T. Rex, read about paleontologists' work with fossils, and study the derivation of the word paleontologist. A concept map on the classroom wall provides a scaffold for organizing related concepts and vocabulary.

• *Stretch students' transfer*. Kim and Burkhauser have experimented with exposing second graders to near-transfer texts (for example, reading about paleontologists studying ammonites (a different type of fossil), mid-transfer passages (archaeologists working in the ruins of Pompei), and far-transfer passages (genealogists and ancestors). Both high- and low-performing students did well on the near- and mid-transfer passages, but students were less successful with the far-transfer passages.

How can teachers put these ideas to work? Kim and Burkhauser suggest that elementary grade-level teacher teams "take a step back and consider not just the content standards that you need to cover but also the schemas that underlie – and perhaps unify – some of these standards… Instead of teaching about the solar system and then being done with it and moving on to the human body and then being done with it, and so on, consider larger schema (the trees) that connect the topics (branches) you are expected to cover." Having decided on a few schemas that unify the topics in the required curriculum, create wall displays and have students periodically zoom out to see the big ideas they've been studying, seeing the way they all fit together.

"Teaching for Transfer Can Help Young Children Read for Understanding" by James Kim and Mary Burkhauser in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2022 (Vol. 103, #8, pp. 20-24); the authors can be reached at james_kim@gse.harvard.edu and mary_burkhauser@gse.harvard.edu.

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4. "Purpose-First" Support for High-School Students

In this *Phi Delta Kappan* article, Jeremy Greenfield (New Visions for Public Schools) remembers a 16-year-old student in his class in the Bronx who knew exactly what he wanted to be when he grew up: a pilot. This boy had what researchers call a *career purpose orientation*: "he had a sense of what he wanted to accomplish after high school," says Greenfield, "and this intention oriented how he behaved in the classroom and the experiences he sought out after the school day ended… He wasn't constantly asking, 'Why are we doing this?' or 'Why do I have to do this?' because he saw how his current work connected to where he was going."

How many teens and young adults are similarly motivated? Only about 20 percent, according to a 2008 study. Not surprisingly, these future-oriented young people have fewer problems in school and lower rates of depression and substance abuse. When Greenfield read another study that described four types of purposeful future orientation; he could remember specific students who embodied each one:

- Interpersonal purpose – a desire to cultivate happy relationships and provide for their loved ones, like an exceptionally extroverted and ebullient student;

- Altruistic purpose – a desire to support their community or society at large, like a student who planned to start organizations to teach students about the role of imperialism and how the colonized ultimately rejected their colonizers;
- Self-oriented purpose – a desire to fulfill personal aspirations, like a budding scientist who took every opportunity to develop those skills;
- Career purpose – a desire to realize career aspirations, like the aspiring pilot.

"These four purpose orientations," says Greenfield, "help us understand that there are multiple pathways to student engagement and fulfillment."

It's unrealistic to think that every high-school student will have one of these mindsets; in addition, kids change their orientations due to circumstances (an illness in the family, the pandemic) or the emergence of a different idea. Greenfield doesn't know if his former student who wanted to be a pilot fulfilled that dream, or is doing something different that made use of the technical, problem-solving, and teamwork skills he was honing. "But the good news," says Greenfield, "is that there is a lot that adults *can* do to support students in cultivating a sense of purpose across all four orientations. The not-so-good news is that today – as in the past – there is no shared belief that schools *should* support students' cultivation of purpose."

He sketches the evolution of U.S. high schools from their origins in the early 1800s, focused on preparing students for the workplace and good citizenship, through the split between academic and vocational tracks, to the more recent emphasis on "college for all." The latest phase has resulted in a major increase in the percentage of high-school graduates going to college and the virtual elimination of the racial/ethnic gap in those who enter college. Very worrisome, however, is the number of less-fortunate students who don't finish college, with "mountains of debt" a major reason.

Greenfield doesn't agree with those who say too many students are going to college. "Rather," he argues, "the problem is that the college-for-all movement has led us to skip the crucial steps of engaging students in thoughtful conversations about who they are as people, where their interests lie, and how a postsecondary institution can help them get where they want to go. When students engage in such conversations and participate in experiences that help hone their interests, they are more likely to identify a college program that they have a reason to stick with, or to choose instead a workforce training program, service program, or other postsecondary option that will point them in the direction of their life's purpose(s)."

How can high schools do better at preparing students to make these vital decisions? Greenfield and his colleagues at New Visions for Public Schools in New York City have identified four key interventions:

• *Student interest inventories and curriculum resources* – Online career exploration and planning surveys like Career One Stop, My Next Move, and Career Explorer provide data that can be used to spark discussions, form interest groups, plan courses and lessons, bring in visiting speakers, and plan field trips, apprenticeships, and internships. "Students love these tools," says Greenfield, "because the focus is on *their* questions and *their* interests." A free open-source platform with curriculum resources is the Fostering Purpose Toolkit.

• *In-school group learning opportunities* – For many high-school students, especially those in underresourced communities, it's not clear how the courses they're required to take for graduation connect to the postsecondary applications they should be submitting. College-and-career and advisory classes are essential for making these connections, and should include a component on self-awareness and responsible decision making – "socioemotional competencies," says Greenfield, "that are not only critical to college and career preparation but also have broad relevance across the curriculum and beyond the school."

• *Work-based and extracurricular learning* – Schools play a critical role in orchestrating an array of experiences including internships, service learning, apprenticeships, paid employment, Model United Nations, athletic programs, theater, and dance – each of which can expand students' learning and help them with the vital task of discovering passions, likes, and dislikes – perhaps the career of their dreams. Schools need external support to do this well, starting with funding for internship coordinators and a network to provide a wide array of opportunities.

• *School counseling support* – Principals play an important role in setting the vision, distributing responsibility, and putting systems and structures in place, says Greenfield. Teachers are key to implementing culturally relevant lessons and helping students "find themselves (and their future selves) in the curriculum." But counselors "play a unique and indispensable role in a school's ecosystem," he believes, helping each student develop a post-secondary plan, adjusting it as interests and circumstances change, guiding students to relevant coursework and internships, organizing virtual college trips, chaperoning in-person college tours, working closely with families, and supporting students' financial aid applications. "It's a lot," says Greenfield. "It may even sound like too much." But with a reasonable caseload, a strong team, and good systems, this vision can become a reality.

"There need not be any conflict among purpose exploration, college and career preparation, and socioemotional development," he concludes. "It is all interconnected. The task before us is to design coherent high-school programs that interweave these elements and are nimble enough to respond to changes that will consistently and inexorably come our way."

"Toward a Purpose-First Model of Postsecondary Support" by Jeremy Greenfield in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2022 (Vol. 103, #8, pp. 37-42); Greenfield can be reached at jgreenfield@newvisions.org.

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5. Ending the School Year with Style

In this *Education Week* article, Michigan teacher Cossondra George suggests activities for positive closure as this difficult year comes to a close:

• *Letters to next year's students* – These might include an overview of what the class is like, descriptions of especially enjoyable projects and activities, tips on how to navigate the teacher's quirks, and suggested strategies for success. George gives these letters to nervous students on the first day of the next school year, and when they read about the class from other

students' perspectives, they "laugh, relax, and get an inside view of what to expect during the upcoming year."

• *Remembering the beginning* – If students started the year filling out questionnaires about themselves, they might be amused looking at them on the last day and seeing how much they changed.

• *A class scrapbook or memory book* – This is a collection of photos and memorabilia collected during the year, either a paper version copied for each student or an electronic version shared online. Older students can contribute photos, younger students might make cartoon-book-style graphics of class highlights with short blurbs describing each scene. When they're older, students love to look back on class scrapbooks.

• *Class evaluations* – Students anonymously share their thoughts (via Survey Monkey or Google Docs) on what they learned during the year, the workload, rules and fairness, and their own contributions and effort. George recommends including at least one open-ended question, perhaps: *What was your favorite thing we did all year? Describe this class in one word. What is one thing you would change about how this class is taught?*

• *An awards assembly* – Classroom-based ceremonies are different from schoolwide events, focusing more on the community the teacher has built and celebrating each student with an award or prize or funny story based on something special they contributed. George recommends doing this on the last day of school, transforming the classroom with tablecloths, decorations, and beverages, and closing with a reading of an inspirational book like *Oh, the Places You'll Go* or a poem the teacher has written about hopes for students going forward.

• *An auction* – Students get advance notice and earn tickets for on-task behavior, completed assignments, or positive attitudes. The teacher collects an assortment of oddball items – stuff from craft or dollar stores, garage sales or thrift shops, fast food toys, toiletries from hotel stays, classroom posters and decorations, CDs, paperbacks, items that parents and local businesses are willing to donate, perhaps a mystery bag. "Make sure you have a variety of items," says George, "and that everyone has earned at least a few tickets to spend. Save big items for the end of the auction to keep interest.

"And however you decide to end the year with your students," she concludes, "make sure to express to them how important your time together has been. Send them into the summer months feeling good about lessons learned and confident that they will continue to grow and succeed."

"Teaching Secrets: Ending the Year on a High Note" by Cossondra George in *Education Week*, May 14, 2022

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6. Books on Social Justice and Tips for Making Them Accessible to ELs

In this article in *Literacy Today*, Annmarie Jackson (University of North Georgia) highlights five children's books with social justice themes and suggests ways they can be used to engage English learners in literature-based talks:

• *Tight Times* by Barbara Shook Hazen, illustrated by Trina Schart Hyman, about a financially struggling family. EL tip: draw students' attention to the book's visuals while reading it aloud, as well as highlighting unfamiliar words and the names of people, places, and things.

• *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting, illustrated by Ronald Himler – a realistic account of a single father and his son who are homeless in an airport. EL tip for Spanish speakers: use cognates like *aeropuerto* and *noticia*.

• *Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story about Racial Injustice* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard, illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin – a story about teasing based on Asian names and newcomers' language, and police brutality. EL tip: have students draw pictures about what it means to be fair and unfair.

• *For the Right to Learn: Malala Yousafzai's Story* by Rebecca Langston-George, illustrated by Janna Rose Bock – the dramatic fight for the education of young women in Pakistan. EL tip: chunk the text, reading a few pages at a time, pausing to talk about the events, and use the think-aloud strategy to model how to infer meaning.

• *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales – an immigrant's experience not knowing the language and culture of the U.S. EL tip: practice syntax or sentence formation by having students sequence cards with individual words from the story.

"Making Critical Discussions Accessible" by Annmarie Jackson in *Literacy Today*, April/May/June 2022 (Vol. 39, #4, pp. 58-59); Jackson is at annmarie.jackson@ung.edu.

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7. Math Lessons on Calculating Risk

In this article in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, Surani Joshua (Phoenix Elementary School District/Fresh Start Math) and seven colleagues describe lesson plans on assessing risks for elementary, middle, and high-school students. Using the Relative Risk Tool web app, students explore the degree of risk for getting Covid-19 and other undesirable consequences and how much risk they believe is acceptable in everyday life.

"Exploring Relative Size with Relative Risk" by Surani Joshua, James Drimalla, Dru Horne, Heather Lavender, Alexandra Yon, Cameron Byerley, Hyunkyoung Yoon, and Kevin Moore in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, May 2022 (Vol. 115, #5, pp. 339-350); Joshua can be reached at sjoshua@asu.edu.

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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