Marshall Memo 822

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 3, 2020

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Education that teaches students to follow the rules, obey authority figures, be honest, help others in need, clean up after themselves, try their best, and be team players is rarely controversial. But without an analysis of power, politics, and one's role in local and global political and economic structures, students are unlikely to become effective citizens who can work with others toward improving the world."

Joel Westheimer (see item #1)

"How classrooms are set up, who gets to talk when, how adults conduct themselves, how decisions are made, how lessons are enacted – all these inevitably serve as lessons in citizenship, in how we live with one another in complex and diverse local, national, and global communities."

Joel Westheimer (*ibid.*)

"On some positions, cowardice asks the question, 'Is it safe?' Expediency asks the question, 'Is it politic?' Vanity asks the question, 'Is it popular?' But conscience asks the question, 'Is it right?'"

Martin Luther King Jr., 1967

"In a country that cannot come to a consensus on fundamental questions – how restricted capitalism should be, whether immigrants are a burden or a boon, to what extent the legacy of slavery continues to shape American life – textbook publishers are caught in the middle."

Dana Goldstein (see item #2)

"The Internet is at once and the same time the most glorious fact-checker and the most effective bias-affirmer ever invented."

Michael Patrick Lynch (quoted in item #3)

"You are entitled to your own opinion, but you are not entitled to your own facts."

Daniel Patrick Moynihan (quoted in item #3)

1. Educating for Full Civic Participation

In this *Kappa Delta Pi Record* article, Joel Westheimer (University of Ottawa) says schools have always tried to instill moral values, good behavior, and character in their students. But what exactly does that mean? For Westheimer, the question is personal: his parents were German Jews who escaped the Nazi Holocaust, but millions of others were not so fortunate. "How could such a highly educated, mature democracy descend into such unimaginable cruelty and darkness?" he asks. What did German schools teach about obedience, civic participation, and dissent? And how can today's schools help kids to "acquire the essential knowledge, dispositions, and skills for effective democratic citizenship to flourish?"

These questions are pertinent: a 2017 Pew poll showed that 22 percent of Americans favor a political system in which a strong leader can make decisions without interference from Congress or the courts. Polls in other western democracies show a similar undercurrent, accompanied by disdain for the free press, civil liberties, and the courts and open hostility toward foreigners and ethnic "others." Researching schools' efforts to teach civic virtues and individual morality, Westheimer has found mediocre practices and a failure to distinguish among, and effectively prepare young people for, three kinds of citizenship:

• *Personally responsible citizen* – The key virtues here are honesty, responsibility, integrity, hard work, self-discipline, and compassion. A responsible citizen obeys laws, pays taxes, helps those in need (for example, contributing to a food drive), and lends a hand in times of crisis.

• *Participatory citizen* – Basic knowledge for participation (taught in schools and families) includes how government works at the local, state, national, and global level; the importance of voting; and the role of civic and religious organizations. The difference between this kind of citizenship and the one above is activism: "While the personally responsible citizen would contribute cans of food for the homeless," says Westheimer, "the participatory citizen might organize the food drive." An active citizen is tuned into society-wide issues, economic and environmental concerns, and knows collective strategies for accomplishing things.

• *Social justice-oriented citizen* – The key at this level is critical thinking about fairness, equality, opportunity, and the root causes of injustice. "If participatory citizens are organizing the food drive and personally responsible citizens are donating food," says Westheimer, "social justice-oriented citizens are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover to address root causes of hunger (e.g., poverty, inequality, structural impediments to self-sufficiency)."

Westheimer's research over the last two decades has found that the third form of citizenship is least often addressed in schools, which focus mostly on volunteering, charity,

obedience, and the three branches of government. That's necessary but not sufficient, he believes: "Education that teaches students to follow the rules, obey authority figures, be honest, help others in need, clean up after themselves, try their best, and be team players is rarely controversial. But without an analysis of power, politics, and one's role in local and global political and economic structures, students are unlikely to become effective citizens who can work with others toward improving the world."

How can schools do a more effective job getting students to think about the origins of major social problems and how they can be solved? asks Westheimer. "We need citizens who can think and act in ethically thoughtful ways. A well-functioning democratic society benefits from classroom practices that teach students to recognize ambiguity and conflict in factual content, to see human conditions and aspirations as complex and contested, and to embrace debate and deliberation as a cornerstone of democratic societies." He suggests the following steps for schools:

• *Teach students to ask questions*. Totalitarian societies have one top-down version of the truth and discourage dissent, even making it illegal. In democratic societies, questioning and constant rethinking of traditions are engines of progress. "Education reformers, school leaders, and parents should do everything possible to ensure that teachers and students have opportunities to ask these kinds of questions," says Westheimer.

• *Expose students to multiple viewpoints*. Students might gather newspaper articles or textbook chapters from different states and countries and ask how they are different, how they are similar, and why. Teachers should get students thinking about how issues that seem trivial to them might be a big deal to others. "Critical empathy" is something teachers should work hard to instill, says Westheimer. "This is the kind of teaching in a globalized world that encourages future citizens to leverage their civic skills for the greater social good rather than for their own particular interests."

• *Teach controversial issues*. Schools may think they're doing this by covering slavery, Nazism, and laws that denied voting rights to women, but what about the #MeToo movement, women's reproductive rights, misinformation campaigns using social media, and debates about what's included in the school curriculum? "Engagement with contemporary controversies from a range of perspectives and using multiple sources of information is exactly what democratic participation requires," says Westheimer.

• *Focus on the local*. Civic education becomes much more immediate when students study and engage in projects in their immediate surroundings – school, neighborhood, town, state. A recent example of this was how students at Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida responded to gun violence at their school. "Their ability to connect a very personal experience with the ways in which government, policy, and social and economic forces shape their lives," says Westheimer, "allowed them to participate on a national scale and, no doubt, prepared them for a life of effective civic engagement."

• *Be political*. Even when teachers are careful not to express their own views, some topics are controversial, with students feeling uncomfortable about the views expressed by classmates. "Democracy can be messy," says Westheimer. "Rather than let fear of sanction and

censorship dictate pedagogical choices, however, teachers should be supported and protected, encouraged to use political debates and controversy as teachable moments in civic discourse."

• *Use teachable moments across the school*. Although these issues will be primarily addressed in civics and social studies classes, there are opportunities in other subject areas, assemblies, the cafeteria, and hallways. "How classrooms are set up, who gets to talk when, how adults conduct themselves, how decisions are made, how lessons are enacted – all these inevitably serve as lessons in citizenship, in how we live with one another in complex and diverse local, national, and global communities," concludes Westheimer. "Whether teachers explicitly teach lessons in citizenship or not, students learn about community organizations, the distribution of power and resources, rights, responsibilities, and justice and injustice."

"Can Education Transform the World?" by Joel Westheimer in *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, January-March 2020 (Vol. 56, #1, pp. 6-12), available for purchase https://bit.ly/2ScpM5b; Westheimer can be reached at joelwestheimer@mac.com.

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2. A Tale of Two States: U.S. History Textbooks in Texas and California

In this *New York Times* article, Dana Goldstein reports on her months-long study of eight widely used 8th and 11th-grade U.S. history textbooks and how they were customized for conservative Texas and liberal California. Goldstein found many differences reflecting the nation's partisan disagreements, driven by state social studies standards, state laws, and feedback from panels of appointees who reviewed textbook drafts. California's Board of Education recently adopted an 842-page social studies framework, while Texas was working with 78 pages of guidelines.

"In a country that cannot come to a consensus on fundamental questions – how restricted capitalism should be, whether immigrants are a burden or a boon, to what extent the legacy of slavery continues to shape American life – textbook publishers are caught in the middle," says Goldstein. "On these questions and others, classroom materials are not only shaded by politics, but are also helping to shape a generation of future voters."

Current textbooks have come a long way in certain respects, says Goldstein, no longer telling the story of Great White Men: "Both Texas and California volumes deal more bluntly with the cruelty of the slave trade, eschewing several myths that were common in textbooks for generations: that some slave owners treated enslaved people kindly and that African-Americans were better off enslaved than free. The books also devote more space to the women's movement and balance the narrative of European immigration with stories of Latino and Asian immigrants."

But detailed requests from reviewers in Sacramento and Austin resulted in hundreds of differences in textbooks that found their way into classrooms. Some examples:

- Both states' textbooks say that breaches of "racial etiquette" led to lynchings after Reconstruction; only California editions make clear that the perpetrators of lynchings also hoped to discourage black political and economic power.

- Only California editions say that enslaved women faced sexual violence from owners and overseers.
- Both states' editions cover women's fight against discrimination in the workplace; only California's notes that birth control played a role by "allowing women to exert greater control over their sexuality and family planning."
- In Texas editions, discussions of LGBTQ issues are restricted to topics like the Stonewall uprising, the AIDS crisis, and debates on marriage rights; California editions have pages of text on the contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and disabled Americans.
- Texas editions do not cover redlining; California editions deal with housing discrimination over time.
- Texas editions have a section on a Border Patrol agent voicing concerns about drug trafficking. He is quoted saying, "If you open the border wide up, you're going to invite political and social upheaval." The California edition does not include this passage, instead giving the space to a long excerpt from the novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez.
- California editions are more likely to note when a historical figure was an immigrant and have more detail on the role that Japanese and Filipino farmworkers played in labor movements.
- California textbooks note that the suburban dream of the 1950s was not accessible to many African Americans; Texas editions do not.
- Texas policymakers say that textbooks should portray a positive view of the U.S. economy, including an "emphasis on the free enterprise system and its benefits." California's standards include this statement: "The yawning gap between the haves and have-nots and what is to be done about it is one of the great questions of this time."
- As a result, California editions celebrate unionism, critique the concentration of wealth, and focus on how industry pollutes the environment.
- The Texas edition highlights criticism of federal efforts to subsidize the green energy industry, including the Solyndra controversy that was a focus of conservatives in 2011. The California edition skips that, highlighting the threat of rising seas.

"Two States. Eight Textbooks. Two American Stories" by Dana Goldstein in *The New York Times*, January 13, 2020, https://nyti.ms/3b7oWiJ; this link https://nyti.ms/36YgP4S includes Goldstein's account of researching and writing the article.

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3. Improving Students' Skills as Media Consumers

In this University Prep (Seattle) faculty newsletter, high-school history teacher Dave Marshall shares the questions he asks students as they tackle issues in a history/current events elective that he's taught since 2017:

• *What are the baseline facts on this topic?* Studying immigration, gun violence, climate change, and other hot topics, they have to start with shared facts and understandings.

As former U.S. senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said, "You are entitled to your own opinion, but you are not entitled to your own facts."

• *How can we learn from each other, even when we disagree?* Norms of civility are being challenged around the world, so the classroom has to be a safe space where students can disagree without being disagreeable. "Often," says Marshall, "our most powerful learning experiences in class happen when two students have an earnest and respectful difference of opinion, whether through an open discussion or structured debate."

• *Where do you get your information, and how do you know it's reliable?* Marshall starts by having students reflect on what they already know about the topic from social media, personal experience, or other sources. He then has students use three resources:

- The Media Bias Chart, which ranks more than 100 news sources by political bias and reliability: https://www.adfontesmedia.com/?v=402f03a963ba
- *The Week*, a magazine with short summaries of news and opinions from a wide variety of publications https://theweek.com, for which Marshall has a class subscription;
- www.allsides.com, another meta-source drawing material from across the political spectrum.

The key is weaning students from "junk news" to a healthier, more balanced media diet.

• *How can (social) media mislead us?* "The Internet is at once and the same time the most glorious fact-checker and the most effective bias-affirmer ever invented," says Michael Patrick Lynch (University of Connecticut). Students need to be schooled in confirmation bias and how some media play on emotions and prioritize engagement and revenue over balanced and accurate news.

• *How can you practice self-care in a 24/7 news cycle?* "A steady diet of news about violence, corruption, and incompetence leads to increased fear, learned helplessness, hopelessness, cynicism, depression, isolation, hostility, contempt, and anxiety," said David Bornstein and Tina Rosenberg in a 2016 *New York Times* article https://nyti.ms/2ueJtS1. It's important for students to be aware of this tendency, tune in to positive stories (especially about young people), and understand that good news is often incremental and less glamorous – but ultimately more important.

"Helping Teens Develop Media Literacy Skills" by Dave Marshall in *University PrepTalk*, January 28, 2020, https://bit.ly/2UlF6z3; Marshall is at dave.s.marshall@gmail.com.

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4. Finding Middle Ground on Early Reading Instruction

(Originally titled "Drawing on Reading Science Without Starting a War")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, Benjamin Riley (Deans for Impact) recalls the U.S. "reading wars," when advocates of explicit phonics and balanced literacy each claimed to have the research on their side. "After some pitched battles in the early 2000s," says Riley, "things seemed to settle into an uneasy truce among reading experts." But now things are heating up again: "Like the polarization infecting American politics currently, polarization around reading science threatens to undermine reasoned deliberation and uptake."

Nonetheless, Riley is optimistic that reasonable people can come together on some insights about reading instruction for beginning learners:

• *Unlike learning to speak, learning to read requires explicit instruction*. Written language is a relatively recent development in human history, invented only 6,000-8,000 years ago, and reading puts significant cognitive demands on the human brain. Very few people learn to read on their own.

• *The evidence points to three key components.* Virtually all children can learn to read, says Riley, if educators and families follow these steps:

- Explicit instruction in phonics – the sounds that letters and combinations of letters represent and the relationships of spelling patterns and pronunciations.
- Lots of reading practice with a variety of engaging texts – this is the bridge from decoding to becoming a fluent reader.
- Building vocabulary and content knowledge, which is more important than learning reading skills – "It's fine for teachers to teach a few comprehension strategies (like making predictions) to students," says Riley, "but they shouldn't overdo it."

His organization and others are involved in a concerted effort to get this consensus embedded in teacher preparation programs.

• *Phonics has sparked resistance because of poor implementation*. "I strongly suspect," says Riley, "that some teachers are hostile to phonics because phonics-based instruction, when done poorly, can be mind-numbing for students to sit through. Teachers who've seen this happen are (rightfully) concerned."

• *It's all about comprehension*. Becoming a good reader entails much more than knowing letters, sounds, and words. "Learning to read," says Riley, "is a progression from decoding text to fluent reading to deeper inference and comprehension. In advocating for reading science, we should recognize this nuanced progression rather than fall into the trap of stridently demanding (on its own) 'more explicit phonics instruction.'"

• *Teacher judgment and discretion are key factors in students' success*. "Scientific insights should inform education practice by adding to a teacher's 'mental model' of how their students make meaning of text," says Riley. "That still leaves a great deal of space for educators to decide which pedagogical techniques they'll use to help students learn to read."

"Drawing on Reading Science Without Starting a War" by Benjamin Riley in *Educational Leadership*, February 2020 (Vol. 77, #5, pp. 16-22), https://bit.ly/36TbonY; Riley can be reached at briley@deansforimpact.org; his organization's publication, "The Science of Early Learning" is available at https://bit.ly/2OnutIvl

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5. Running Records: A Quick and "Surprisingly Fruitful" Diagnostic Tool

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Jennifer Barone (Glastonbury, Connecticut elementary reading teacher), Pamela Khairallah (literacy consultant), and Rachael Gabriel (University of Connecticut) say that data from running records are often used for compliance reporting – or not used at all (perhaps because of misconceptions about their purpose). "It is

time," they say, "to revive the purpose, remember the practice, and reinvigorate the analysis of running records for ongoing instructional planning. In doing so, teachers will make the most of every instructional and planning minute to target instruction."

One of six components of the Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement, running records are individually administered records of oral reading. As the student reads a short passage aloud, the teacher uses specific symbols to record the student's use and integration of meaning, language structure, and visual information, as well as self-corrections, repetitions, and omissions. While running records can be used to assess students' accuracy and reading level, Barone, Khairallah, and Gabriel believe their best use is as a diagnostic tool to help plan the most effective next steps.

The authors describe two different teachers listening to the mistakes their students made while reading a Level G text. The correct line in the story was: *Then he fished and fished*.

- Student A read: *Then he found and found*.
- Student B read: *Then he fished a fish*.
- Student C read: *Then he fish and fish*.

One teacher heard these readings during individual running records. She was able to see that all three were successfully using first-letter sounds and were ready for instruction in cross-checking letters and syntactic information, scanning through words, and checking the middle and end parts while paying attention to the meaning of the story.

The second teacher heard these errors in a small reading group (she wasn't using running records) and responded quite differently. She saw that *fished* was difficult for students and followed up by teaching inflectional endings and retaught the whole class a mini-lesson on vowel teams. She wasn't able to see what students were able to do and the specific next steps that would be most helpful. This is quite common with teachers who lack the diagnostic information provided by running records: "isolated and disjointed lessons that fail to support the development of strategic reading behaviors that transfer across texts." Often these teachers adhere to the district pacing guide and move students up to the next level of reading difficulty without addressing reading problems that will continue to cause problems down the road.

The power of running records is that they quickly provide the kind of detailed diagnostic information that teachers can use to identify patterns and make instructional decisions as they work with small groups and the whole class. "This combination of specific, individualized reinforcement, immediate corrective feedback, and supervised practice," say Barone, Khairallah, and Gabriel, "is the very definition of explicit instruction… This is the beginning of the sophisticated phonics work students must develop to match growing text complexity for reading and writing." Data from running records may also point to the need for all-class or small-group instruction on a specific skill.

"As diagnostic teaching tools," the authors conclude, "running records allow teachers to think like coaches who prepare their players for games rather than for excellence in isolated drills. For example, soccer coaches know that skill drills are needed to build soccer players. They also know that players need scrimmages and game situations to try out and get feedback on using the isolated skills they practice in real games. Similarly, we cannot teach reading

skills in isolation and never provide opportunities to try them out in the game: the reading of rich, engaging texts… Coaches give on-the-spot feedback and tips, in their players' zone of proximal development, just as teachers do with students. Even or especially when it feels as if doing one more thing will be overwhelming, taking a running record can make the planning and prompting you already do more focused, purposeful, and powerful."

"Running Records Revisited: A Tool for Efficiency and Focus" by Jennifer Barone, Pamela Khairallah, and Rachael Gabriel in *The Reading Teacher*, January/February 2020 (Vol. 73, #4, pp. 525-530), available for purchase at https://bit.ly/3705amk; the authors can be reached at jlbarone22@gmail.com, pkhairallah@deligent.com, and rachael.gabriel@uconn.edu.

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6. A Tennessee District Revamps Its ELA Curriculum

(Originally titled "A District Leader's Education in Early Reading")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Tennessee district leader Jared Myracle says his years as a high-school history teacher and secondary-school administrator gave him "a powerful window into the consequences of poor early reading instruction and the challenges students face when their literacy skills are below grade level." Upon becoming a district chief academic officer, Myracle looked at the research on reading instruction and was surprised to find agreement on a set of "interlocking approaches" that boost reading proficiency across the board:

- Systematically teaching phonics in the early grades;
- Building students' subject-area knowledge;
- Not spending much time teaching reading skills (e.g., finding the main idea or determining the author's purpose);
- Rather, spending time reading knowledge-based texts and writing about them;
- Not grouping students by reading level, since levels fluctuate widely depending on background knowledge on a given topic (grouping may widen achievement gaps);
- Instead, challenging all students with grade-level texts using scaffolding as necessary.

Visiting classrooms, Myracle found that these insights were not widely implemented; what he saw was a hodge-podge of reading skills instruction and few deep dives into content to build students' knowledge and vocabulary in specific areas.

"I should clarify that the fragmented curricular approach we often see in schools is *not* the fault of teachers," he says. "As leaders, we have not placed enough emphasis on providing our teachers with the cohesive instructional materials they need – we have spent far too long assuming that they can simply create everything they teach. This is not working." With input from teachers, Myracle's district purchased a K-2 curriculum focused on knowledge-building read-alouds and structured phonics, and a grade 3-5 package that continued knowledge-building with opportunities for students to read multiple authentic texts. As a result of these purchases and teacher training on the new materials, the district saw immediate, significant gains in phonemic awareness and engagement in curriculum content and reading and writing proficiency. Myracle was delighted to hear kindergarten students talking about the /l/ sound in

leaves and then describing the difference between evergreen and deciduous trees – using those terms.

Reflecting on the district's changes, Myracle says he and his colleagues could have been tied up deciding on programs and answering detailed questions about the sequence of phonics instruction. Don't overthink it! he advises: "Perfection is truly the enemy of progress if debates about the finer points of reading instruction delay action on the major components that are already agreed upon by the research. Improving outcomes at scale begins by painting with broad strokes." No curriculum is perfect, but excellent guidance is available (for example, EdReports), and teacher training can customize materials at the school and classroom level. "It is the pairing of coherent curriculum with pedagogical skill that translates into the art and science of teaching and truly drives learning," Myracle concludes.

"A District Leader's Education in Early Reading" by Jared Myracle in *Educational Leadership*, February 2020 (Vol. 77, #5, pp. 24-29), available for ASCD members or for purchase at https://bit.ly/2Oq320r; Myracle can be reached at jamyracle@jmcss.org

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7. Adam Grant Suggests a Strategic Interview Question

In this 2-1/2-minute YouTube talk, Adam Grant (University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School) suggests the following question at the conclusion of a job interview: Name four people whose careers you've helped to advance. When candidates name people above them in their current organization, that's not a good sign; they may be what Grant calls "takers" who try to please their bosses for selfish reasons. When candidates name people at their level in the hierarchy or below, that's a good sign; they're more likely to be "givers" who generously support the growth and development of those they work with.

"Givers Take All: How to Create a Culture of Productive Generosity at Your School" by Adam Grant, June 5, 2018 on YouTube https://bit.ly/2SdIIR7; spotted in *Educator's Notebook #322* by Peter Nilsson, February 1, 2020

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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 50 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 a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 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
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Essential Teacher
Exceptional Children
Go Teach
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
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Education Gadfly
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 Magazine