

# Marshall Memo 933

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education  
April 25, 2022

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## Quotes of the Week

“Delegated tasks and projects can provide experiences that develop strategic thinking in the analytical, courage in the meek, and empathy in the self-assured.”

Mike Rutherford (see item #1)

“Servant leaders delegate intentionally, mindfully – and *purposefully* – with the goal of helping others to grow and develop.”

Joe Iarocci (quoted in *ibid.*)

“If a task is just a task, say so. Not every task in one’s career will be a developmental bonanza.”

Mike Rutherford (*ibid.*)

“When you give advice, you tend to feel smart and helpful. But no one should presume to know better than a peer what to do in that person’s own unique situation.”

Boris Groysberg and Robert Russman Halperin (see item #5)

“None of us get from public schools the precise instruction and exact social dynamics that we’d prescribe. That’s because they don’t exist to validate our individual worldviews. They’re *public* schools, and I and most of the other people I know, whether we have children or not, are happy to fund them, because we believe in education and we believe in democracy.”

Frank Bruni (Duke University) in [“Parents Aren’t the Only Ones Who Have Rights”](#) in *The New York Times*, April 23, 2022

“Learning is a process that mediates meaning, motivation, and context through thinking and practice.”

James Lamar Foster, Lawrence Louis, and Elizabeth Winston (see item #8)

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## 1. The Art of Delegation

In this article in *Leadership Notes*, consultant/writer Mike Rutherford says delegating tasks can serve three purposes: time management for the leader; developing the organization's skills; and job enrichment for the person to whom a task is delegated. To accomplish all three, Rutherford suggests the following principles:

- *Delegate stretch tasks.* “We do our best work, and we grow the most, when the task represents a challenge, yet is within our reach,” he says. “Give APs principal work to do, administrative assistants AP work to do, and volunteers and interns administrative assistant work to do.” In the words of CEO Joe Iarocci, “Servant leaders delegate intentionally, mindfully – and *purposefully* – with the goal of helping others to grow and develop.”

- *Connect work to mission.* “We enrich a person's work life when we take care to clearly link the delegated task to the larger purpose or mission of the organization,” says Rutherford. Asking an assistant principal to cover a JV basketball game will be more fulfilling if they see it as part of building a positive school climate.

- *Be transparent about humdrum jobs.* “If a task is just a task, say so,” says Rutherford. “Not every task in one's career will be a developmental bonanza.”

- *Delegate for depth and breadth of experience.* It's good for people to get deeper experience with one area through plenty of practice, but it's also wise to mix things up. Rutherford remembers that in his first assistant principal position in a high school, the principal rotated assignments among the four APs. It seemed inefficient at first, but they realized that their boss was preparing each administrator for the much bigger job of being a principal.

- *Involve people in designing their delegated responsibilities.* While it's helpful to know about a person's goals and interests when assigning tasks, they should expect that not all tasks will be in their “strike zone.”

- *Empower but don't abandon.* One tendency with delegation is to micromanage and not let go. Equally problematic is delegating and not monitoring, guiding, and encouraging. The sweet spot is balancing empowerment with feedback and autonomy with accountability. “Delegated tasks and projects,” concludes Rutherford, “can provide experiences that develop strategic thinking in the analytical, courage in the meek, and empathy in the self-assured.”

[“Principles of Purposeful Delegation”](#) by Mike Rutherford in *Leadership Notes*, April 2022; Rutherford can be reached at [mike@rutherfordlg.com](mailto:mike@rutherfordlg.com).

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## 2. A Strategy for Overcoming Implicit Bias

“Receiving help can make or break a career, but women and racial/ethnic minorities do not always receive the support they seek,” say Erika Kirgios, Aneesh Rai, and Katherine Milkman (Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania) and Edward Chang (Harvard Business School) in this research report in *Nature Human Behaviour*. In one experiment, the researchers sent 2,476 white male politicians an e-mail from a fictitious student asking for career advice. The e-mails used different names for the student asking for advice: in some, the name appeared to be that of a white male, in others that of a woman or a person of color. Some of the e-mails explicitly revealed the sender’s racial/ethnic identity – for example, “As a young African-American woman...” while others referred to themselves as “a young person.” How did the politicians respond?

- Women and people of color were 24 percent more likely to get a reply when they were explicit about their identity.
- White males got the same rate of response whether or not they highlighted their identity.

In a second study, a demographically diverse group of adults received an e-mail from “Demarcus Rivers,” some explicitly stating that he was an African-American male, some without an explicit statement. The result:

- Senders were 80 percent more likely to receive an offer of career help when “Demarcus” was explicit about his racial identity.

The race, gender, and political ideology of those who received the e-mail did not affect their responses.

The researchers’ conclusion: “When a help seeker highlights their marginalized identity, it may activate prospective helpers’ motivations to avoid prejudiced reactions and increase their willingness to provide support... These findings suggest that deliberately mentioning identity in requests for help can improve outcomes for women and racial/ethnic minorities.”

[“When Seeking Help, Women and Racial/Ethnic Minorities Benefit from Explicitly Stating Their Identity”](#) by Erika Kirgios, Aneesh Rai, Edward Chang, and Katherine Milkman in *Nature Human Behaviour*, January 22, 2022) summarized in *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 2022 (Vol. 100, #3, p. 28); Kirgios can be reached at [ekirgios@wharton.upenn.edu](mailto:ekirgios@wharton.upenn.edu).

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## 3. Areas Where Classroom Bias Can Arise

In this article in *Theory Into Practice*, Kara Ieva (Rowan University) and Jordon Beasley (Augusta University) begin with an anecdote in which an African-American high-school student complains to a counselor about racial bias in an art class. Ieva and Beasley highlight the key role of counselors in listening to students’ concerns, getting into classrooms, and following up skillfully with teachers. The researchers list seven areas where classroom biases may need to be addressed:

- Labeling – Are some students being talked about in a derogatory way – for example, “frequent flyers”?

- Classroom procedures – In discussions, are some students called on more than others? Do some students get more repeated directions, reminders for making up work, accommodations, and permission to visit the bathroom?
- Expectations – Is there an assumption that some students will produce lower-quality work? – for example, “I’m surprised to see you got all of the answers correct.”
- Grading and assessments – Are subjective criteria used in the grades given to some students? – for example, taking off points for handwriting.
- Discipline referrals – Are some students being referred for behaviors that are ignored with other students?
- Recommendations – Are some students recommended for gifted and selective programs over others who are equally qualified?
- Pedagogy – Are curriculum materials and teaching methods not inclusive and culturally appropriate?

Hearing from students and observing classes, say Ieva and Beasley, school counselors are ideally situated to be counselors, teachers, and consultants for their colleagues. “Through various points of entry,” they conclude, “school counselors assist teachers in their social-emotional development and self-exploration of their own cultural identity as it impacts their students. Through this process, school counselors and teachers work to promote a culturally affirming classroom, school, and community where students are free to flourish socially, emotionally, and academically.”

[“Dismantling Racism Through Collaborative Consultation: Promoting Culturally Affirming Educator SEL”](#) by Kara Ieva and Jordon Beasley in *Theory Into Practice*, Spring 2022 (Vol. 61, #2, pp. 236-249); Ieva can be reached at [ieva@rowan.edu](mailto:ieva@rowan.edu).

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#### **4. “Attendance Value-Added” – A New Measure of School Quality**

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Amber Northern and Michael Petrilli summarize a new Fordham Institute study on student attendance. The key points:

- Student attendance has been slow to recover from the pandemic. There’s an “apparent normalization of student absenteeism, especially in low-income communities,” say Northern and Petrilli.

- Relying on raw attendance data and chronic absenteeism misses a lot. Both are highly correlated to student demographics and other factors over which schools have limited influence. This means standard attendance data are not good indicators for school quality under the Every School Succeeds Act (ESSA) because they don’t take into account what the school is – or isn’t – doing to improve attendance and school climate.

- Many schools don’t keep track of partial-day absences. Students reporting to school but skipping some classes during the day escalates at the middle and high-school level. “Prior research shows that partial-day absenteeism is rampant in secondary schools, mostly

unexcused,” say Northern and Petrilli, “and explains more missed classes than full-day absenteeism.”

• “Attendance valued-added” measures what a school is doing about absenteeism. It does so by factoring in steps like these:

- The school closely monitors attendance to catch problems early.
- Three absences trigger a parent phone call.
- If the parent can’t be reached by phone or e-mail, there’s a home visit.
- Students with frequent absences are referred to the school counselor or social worker for case management and counseling.
- High-school students stay with the same homeroom teacher for all four years, building relationships and making it easier to monitor attendance and address it with families.

Attendance value-added varies widely among schools – some do much better than others – and is highly stable over time.

• Attendance value-added is closely tied to students’ perceptions of climate and safety. These perceptions – and knowing that the school has clear behavioral expectations – are key to students and families trusting the school and improving attendance.

• Attending a school with high attendance value-added is linked to lower absenteeism. The Fordham study showed that going to a high school making those efforts was associated with a student attending 28 more class periods a year – about four full school days.

• Attendance value-added data hold schools accountable for what’s under their control. “Simply put,” say Northern and Petrilli, “attendance value-added differentiates between high-poverty schools that deserve to be lauded and those that demand intervention.” This may make it easier for school leaders to attract teachers to a school on an upward trajectory – and for parents to choose that school in districts where there’s choice.

• Schools should continue to collect raw attendance and chronic absenteeism data and consider them side-by-side with attendance value-added. Combined, they give school and district leaders a better handle on the problem, and are more helpful to parents in choosing schools.

[“A Better Way to Measure Student Absenteeism”](#) by Amber Northern and Michael Petrilli in *Education Gadfly*, April 14, 2022; the full study is [Imperfect Attendance: Toward a Fairer Measure of Student Absenteeism](#) by Jing Liu, April 13, 2022.

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## 5. Effective Use of Peer Support Groups

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Boris Groysberg (Harvard Business School) and Robert Russman Halperin (HBS Alumni Forum Services) describe the ideal dynamics of peer support groups: members share concerns, are open and vulnerable, hear different viewpoints, clarify priorities, make decisions with greater confidence, and form connections that help them feel safe, grounded, and capable. Here’s what Groysberg and Halperin’s research revealed about the most successful groups:

- *Group composition* – Ideally members are in professional roles that are similar in scope, tenure, and complexity (for example, groups of Los Angeles school leaders), have diverse perspectives, are willing to listen and ask good questions and share their experiences and feelings. Members shouldn't have inherent conflicts, competing priorities, hidden agendas, or past baggage.

- *Group size and purpose* – The sweet spot, say Groysberg and Halperin, is 4-7 members for virtual and 4-10 for in-person groups. Members should be clear on why they're meeting: is it professional support, networking, friendship, personal development, or something else?

- *Key questions* – “Are these people I can learn from and grow with? Can they support and challenge me? Do the issues and opportunities we want to discuss intersect in compelling ways? Are members willing to make a serious commitment to protect the meeting time and show up for one another?”

- *Agendas* – Members agree on the range of topics that will be discussed. In many successful groups, say Groysberg and Halperin, work and personal concerns are on the table and no issue is too sensitive or taboo to discuss.

- *Principles for participation* – To foster psychological safety and productive conversations, members commit to:

- Confidentiality – This is reinforced at every meeting and there's a clear process for addressing concerns that arise.
- Candor – Being frank and honest with each other.
- Openness and vulnerability – Members admit worries about competence and decisions and share regrets and disappointments.
- Sharing experiences, not advice – “When you give advice, you tend to feel smart and helpful,” say Groysberg and Halperin. “But no one should presume to know better than a peer what to do in that person's own unique situation... An easy rule of thumb is to stick to the first person: ‘Here's what struck a chord with me as I heard your story. Here's what I did. Here's what happened to me and how I felt.’”

- *Proven processes* – The authors say forums typically meet once a month, often on a set day and time, for 2-4 hours in person or 1-3 hours virtually. There's often a regular sequence:

- Check-in – Members show up on time, silence their devices, and the moderator reminds everyone of the ground rules and asks if any members aren't able to be fully present, trusting, and vulnerable.
- Updates – Members give a 3-5-minute overview of the most significant issues on their minds – perhaps the biggest opportunities and greatest challenges.
- Presentations – The heart of the meeting is one or two members talking in depth about a dilemma or problem of practice, potential courses of action, and desired outcomes. Other members ask clarifying and thought-provoking questions and share how they connect to the issue and what emotions or experiences it evokes.
- Topical exercises – The group might decide to discuss an assigned reading, case study, or guiding question.

- Crisis mode – An event like the pandemic might lead the group to focus on that issue and how it affects members.
- Closure – All participants reflect on their takeaways, new insights, questions, and to-do items.
- Leadership – The role of moderator rotates, taking responsibility for setting the agenda, guiding discussion, and setting high expectations for (and modeling) deep sharing. An assistant moderator might keep notes and handle meeting logistics.
- Training – It’s helpful for everyone to be oriented and prepared for the role of moderator and onboarding new members.
- Annual retreats – An off-site gathering in a less formal setting helps a group go deeper, reinforce best practices, and delve into issues that haven’t been fully discussed.
- Remote meetings – Teleconferencing can work, say the authors, if members keep their cameras on, give the conversation their undivided attention, use features like chats, digital whiteboards, and screen sharing, and refrain from recording meetings or doing screen capturing.

• *Monitoring quality* – “The performance, efficacy, and value of forums can’t be taken for granted,” say Groysberg and Halperin. Members need to be alert to problems, which might include an overly rigid agenda, a few members dominating discussions, or violation of confidentiality. It’s helpful for the leader to clear the air when there are signs of trouble, bring in an outside moderator when necessary, and poll members after each meeting. Some possible questions:

- What worked and didn’t work in today’s meeting?
- Is everyone aligned with our group’s purpose, values, and norms?
- What changes would make our group more valuable?
- How can we further advance both individual and shared objectives?
- Are we all pulling our own weight, participating fully, expressing appreciation for others’ contributions, and raising concerns when we have them?

[“How to Get the Most Out of Peer Support Groups”](#) by Boris Groysberg and Robert Russman Halperin in *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 2022 (Vol. 100, #3, pp. 130-141)

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## 6. The Debate on Banning Books

In this *New York Times* article, high-school junior Sungjoo Yoon says he’s in the middle of a debate in his California district about the removal of five classic novels from the district’s mandatory core curriculum:

- *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain
- *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
- *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor
- *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck

The books were removed in 2020 after complaints from students and parents that depictions of racism – especially the use of the N-word – caused harm to African-American students.

Yoon is sympathetic to the harm caused by racism – he’s felt the sting of it himself – but doesn’t believe these books are the reason students of color are marginalized in classrooms. He felt so strongly that he launched a petition against the ban and has gathered more than 5,000 signatures. The solution, he contends, isn’t to ban these novels but to add more books authored by people of color and provide better training for teachers to lead sensitive classroom discussions.

Since the ban was enacted, Yoon has been increasingly discouraged with school board meetings, which have devolved into “tribal dissention” between those favoring the ban and those advocating “freedom.” What’s missing, he believes, has been a discussion of the merits and drawbacks of the books themselves. Yoon says that reading four of these novels in school “helped shape me both as a student and as a human being,” and classroom discussions “helped move me and some fellow students from complacent private citizens to people who today are deeply involved in the fight for social justice.”

Specifically, he remembers that reading Mildred Taylor’s book “under the guidance of a caring teacher... moved me to tears and to a commitment to learn more about the resilience and resistance of the people upon whose backs this country was built.” Reading about Atticus Finch’s defense of Tom Robinson taught him the danger of complacency. The unlikely friendships between Huck and Jim, and between Phillip and Timothy (in *The Cay*), conveyed the powerful message “that love transcends any and all differences.”

Yoon agrees that some books are inappropriate. When he was ten, he found a copy of *The Rape of Nanking* at home, started reading, and was so “terrified and upset” that he closed the book and hid it “deep in my closet.” Schools need to make decisions about which books are suitable for students of certain ages, he says, and which books should not be in the curriculum at all. But Yoon believes we should “reject the false binary being sold to us today, because there is some value in restricting curriculum to children when those decisions are informed by a knowledge of the books and the capacities of the students.”

“I hope,” he concludes, “that the adults who make the decisions about our schools and our educations, and those who fuel the public arguments over them, can put an end to their hyperpartisanship and help us to begin rigorous conversations about the content and value of the books themselves.”

[“Let’s Stop Arguing About the Bans and Start Arguing About the Books”](#) by Sungjoo Yoon in *The New York Times*, April 21, 2022

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## **7. Deconstructing the LGBTQ Culture War**

In this *New York Times* column, Ross Douthat lists Gallup’s findings on the percent of each age cohort that identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender:

- Boomers: 3 percent
- Generation X: 4 percent

- Millennials: 10 percent
- Generation Z: 21 percent

The steep increase from the generation born right after World War II to those born between 1997 and 2003 is sparking three different reactions:

- *This is great news.* “Sexual fluidity and transgender experience are clearly intrinsic to the human experience,” says Douthat, channeling this reaction; “our society used to suppress them cruelly and only now are we getting a true picture of the real diversity of attractions and identities. So the response from society should be sustained encouragement, especially if you care about teenage mental health.” According to this view, educators should support kids’ gender expression unreservedly.

- *We shouldn’t read too much into it.* What kids are telling us, Douthat channels, “is mostly just young people being young people, experimenting and differentiating themselves from their elders... We shouldn’t freak out over their self-identification – but neither should we treat it as a definitive revelation about human nature.” Many who currently identify as bisexual will probably end up in straight relationships, and some identifying as transgender may drift back to conventional identities as they get older.

- *This trend is bad news.* “It isn’t just a continuation of the gay rights revolution,” Douthat channels; “it’s a form of social contagion. These kids aren’t setting themselves free from patriarchy; they’re under the influence of online communities of imitation and academic fashions laundered into psychiatry and education.” And it’s not making kids happier, judging by the waning of sex and relationships and the worsening of young-adult mental health.

Florida’s new law restricting what public schools can discuss around sexual orientation and gender identity is being viewed through these three lenses. The law was motivated by those in the third camp and is opposed by those in the first, who have dubbed it the “Don’t Say Gay” bill. Those in the second camp might agree that schools should be neutral on these topics and leave them to families. “But the deliberate vagueness of the Florida law,” says Douthat, “also means that it could be used to roll back gay rights or gay visibility – whether by pushing gay teachers into the closet or discouraging any discussion of sexual orientation in older grades.” Since acceptance of LGTBQ people and relationships is widely established in the U.S., the second camp might turn against laws like Florida’s.

Having described the contours of the current debate, Douthat goes on to suggest three “complications”:

First, the conservative camp is surprisingly diverse, he says. It includes social conservatives and also some advocates of same-sex marriage and some liberal feminists. The gay rights movement emphasized biological realities (*born this way*) and embraced a conventional strategy in marriage equality, leading some to push back on the “social-constructedness” of gender differences. And a contingent of feminists (including J.K. Rowling) are uncomfortable with eliding biological sex differences, seeing them as traditionally the basis of feminist beliefs.

A second complication, says Douthat, is that possible medical interventions with trans-identifying youth “dramatically raise the stakes and undercut the agnostic middle ground.” The

wait-and-see-kids-are-experimenting approach “is plausible to the extent that teenage exploration takes the form of dating both sexes, using a different pronoun, changing a wardrobe” – but it falls apart with interventions that may be irreversible.

Schools get in trouble if they are seen as keeping information from parents, but parental rejection can increase the chance that LGBTQ youth may take their own lives.

Douthat believes a third complication is that social and political pressures are making many progressives reluctant to admit that they’re actually in the second camp – or might even be in the third. This “limits debate within crucial liberal institutions,” he says, “so that the skeptical position feels almost untouchable in some parts of the academy and media. In this regard, American liberalism is drifting away even from the most liberal and secular parts of Europe.”

Douthat ends by expressing his concern that our current “experiment on trans-identifying youth” is proceeding without solid evidence and calling for a data-driven discussion about the psychological and medical stakes involved.

[“How to Make Sense of the New L.G.B.T. Culture War”](#) by Ross Douthat in *The New York Times*, April 17, 2022

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## 8. Hallmarks of Deep Learning

“Learning is a process that mediates meaning, motivation, and context through thinking and practice,” say James Lamar Foster (University of Washington/Seattle), Lawrence Louis (Michigan State University), and Elizabeth Winston (Highline Public Schools, Seattle, WA) in this article in *Theory Into Practice*. They point to the research of Keith Sawyer (2006) on the way deep learning occurs:

- It builds on prior knowledge.
- It requires that students look for patterns and underlying conceptual themes.
- It demands that students evaluate new ideas and make connective conclusions.
- It is enhanced when students talk about ideas with others.
- It is deepened by ongoing reflection and metacognition.
- It is enhanced when students use concrete examples to grasp abstract concepts.

[“Creating Conditions for Social-Emotional Learning: An Ecological Framework”](#) by James Lamar Foster, Lawrence Louis, and Elizabeth Winston in *Theory Into Practice*, Spring 2022 (Vol. 61, #2, pp. 224-235); Sawyer’s paper, “Optimising Learning: Implications of Learning Science Research: is available [here](#).

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## 9. Short Item:

*Your City or Town Way Back in Time* – This [interactive map](#) by Meilan Solly in *Smithsonian Magazine* allows you to view the status of your geographic location at intervals over the last 750 million years.

“This Map Lets You Plug in Your Address to See How It’s Changed Over the Last 750 Million Years” by Meilan Solly, *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 15, 2019

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# 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