

# Marshall Memo 1039

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

June 3, 2024

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## Quotes of the Week

“Encouragement can be the oxygen of the soul.”

Adele Faber (see item #1)

“Know history, know self. No history, no self.”

José Rizal, an activist who helped inspire Philippine resistance to Spanish colonization

“It’s hard to be curious when you’re furious.”

Karin Hurt and David Dye (see item #7)

“We owe the high-school class of 2024 an apology. You got a raw deal. You were born in 2006. We gave you a smartphone for your seventh birthday and made you captive to big tech’s finest algorithms. Your eighth-grade field trip to Six Flags was canceled due to Covid. Ditto for your middle-school graduation ceremony. You spent the first half of your freshman year of high school – already a festival of awkwardness – staring at your new classmates on Zoom while we argued amongst ourselves about whether it was safe to re-open buildings. And now, as you are dealing with the stress of applying to college, we messed up the FAFSA... Speaking for the rest of the American adult population, I hope you can find it in your hearts to forgive us because we are counting on you to support us when we are old and infirm.”

Tim Daly in [“Five Things We Learned This School Year.”](#) *Education Gadfly*, May 30, 2024

“We know enough about neurodiversity to know that the ‘sitting still and listening’ way of doing school doesn’t work well for many students.”

Sarah Riggs Johnson in [“Not Just for Math: A Tiered System of Learning Supports in Any Subject”](#) in *Cult of Pedagogy*, May 30, 2024

“The fear of getting the problem ‘wrong’ starts early. By the time kids are adolescents, anxiety

becomes a strong barrier to learning. More than anything, students do not want to mess up in front of their peers.”

Sarah Riggs Johnson (*ibid.*)

“Every year there are students who learn more math, language, and other skills than their peers in the classroom next door because they were lucky enough to get assigned to a more-effective teacher. Those lucky students will go on to have more success as adults in college and in the workforce. Understanding why some teachers are more effective than others is an urgent long-standing challenge.”

Eric Taylor (quoted in item #2)

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## 1. A Tribute to Adele Faber

Adele Faber, a former high-school teacher who, with co-author Elaine Mazlish, helped countless parents and educators communicate more effectively with young people, died April 24<sup>th</sup> at age 96. Inspired by psychologist Haim Ginott, Faber and Mazlish were best known for their 1980 book, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*. Here is a *New York Times* [obituary](#), and a selection of quotes:

### Parenting:

- I was a wonderful parent before I had children. I was an expert on why everyone else was having problems with theirs. Then I had three of my own.
- Children don't need more things, they need more love.
- It's not helpful when parents respond with more intensity than the child feels.
- The attitude behind our words is as important as the words themselves.
- Sometimes it's more important to be kind than to be right.
- Children often experience praise of a brother or sister as a put-down of themselves. They automatically translate, 'Your brother is so considerate' into 'Mom thinks I'm not.' It's a good idea to save our enthusiastic comments for the ear of the deserving child.
- It's a bittersweet road we parents travel. We start with total commitment to a small, helpless human being. Over the years we worry, plan, comfort, and try to understand. We give our love, our labor, our knowledge, and our experience – so that one day he or she will have the inner strength and confidence to leave us.

### Autonomy:

- Never do for a child what he can do for himself.
- When we give children advice or instant solutions, we deprive them of the experience that comes from wrestling with their own problems.

- Support your child through his or her struggles, rather than rescuing them from every difficulty.
- Our role as parents is to be our child's emotional coach, not to fight their battles for them.
- Children grow less anxious and develop more self-control when they realize they can manage their feelings and problems themselves.
- The more that children believe they have a say, the more they are willing to take responsibility for their behavior.

#### Emotions:

- Behind every behavior, there is a feeling. Behind every feeling, there is a need.
- It's hard for children to change their behavior when their feelings are completely ignored.
- Not till the bad feelings come out can the good ones come in.
- It's important to make a distinction between allowing feelings and allowing actions. We permit children to express all their feelings. We don't permit them to hurt each other. Our job is to show them how to express their anger without doing damage.
- Connection is our deepest human need.

#### Praise and criticism:

- Praise should focus on the child's effort, not his or her abilities.
- Children become very uncomfortable with praise that evaluates them. They push it away. Sometimes they'll deliberately misbehave to prove you wrong.
- When a kid is starving, even cotton candy is better than nothing. But why settle for so little? We want to give our children the kind of emotional nourishment that will help them become independent thinkers and doers.
- Instead of focusing on what's wrong, start by acknowledging what a child has accomplished. Then point out what still needs to be done.

#### Support:

- A child needs encouragement like a plant needs water.
- Encouragement can be the oxygen of the soul.
- When a person is drowning, it's not the time to give swimming lessons.
- Children need love, especially when they do not deserve it.
- When our children feel safe around us, they can open their hearts to us.
- To be loved equally is somehow to be loved less. To be loved uniquely – for one's own special self – is to be loved as much as we need to be loved.

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## **2. The Way Teachers Spend Classroom Time Really Matters**

In this article in *Ed. Magazine*, Heather Corn quotes Eric Taylor (Harvard Graduate School of Education): "Every year there are students who learn more math, language, and other skills than their peers in the classroom next door because they were lucky enough to get

assigned to a more-effective teacher. Those lucky students will go on to have more success as adults in college and in the workforce. Understanding why some teachers are more effective than others is an urgent, long-standing challenge.”

Taylor recently conducted a study in which he (and co-authors Simon Burgess and Shenila Rawal) explored this question by observing 250 U.K. secondary teachers over two years. The researchers zeroed in on how teachers used classroom time in four categories:

- Direct instruction – lecturing or dictation, students copying from the whiteboard, teacher using the whiteboard, teacher using a textbook;
- Class and peer interaction – open teacher/student discussion, working in groups;
- Personalized instruction – one-to-one teaching, teacher helping struggling students;
- Practice and assessment – students doing written work alone, teacher gauging learning via oral or written assessments, teacher assigning homework or class work.

In their classroom observations, the researchers noticed wide and idiosyncratic variations in the ways teachers used classroom time. Teachers’ choices were largely unrelated to the subject being taught and the characteristics of students in their classes.

But when it came to students’ performance on English and math GCSE exams, the way some teachers allocated class time made a big difference:

- In math, students whose teachers had devoted more class time to individual practice and assessments did better on exams.
- In ELA, students whose teachers devoted more time to discussion and student-peer collaborative work got higher test scores.

Could this be correlation rather than causation? “Perhaps math teachers who spend more class time on individual practice are also teachers who are more skilled at asking good questions or managing student behavior,” says Taylor. “Perhaps those questioning and management skills are the true cause of students learning more.”

But the researchers controlled for this by rating teachers’ pedagogical skills on the Danielson Framework, and found that *among* math teachers with high pedagogical ratings, student achievement varied according to how class time was allocated; the same was true among high-scoring ELA teachers. In other words, teachers’ generic instructional skills did not line up with how they allocated classroom time; both were important to student achievement, but how time was used was independent and significant.

“These results,” say Taylor and his co-authors, “suggest opportunities to improve student achievement without changes in teachers’ skills.” Principals aren’t paying enough attention to how teachers allocate classroom time, they believe. It’s something that school leaders should emphasize as they supervise and coach teachers, especially with novices who haven’t yet formed hard-to-change pedagogical habits.

[“Does It Matter How Teachers Use Class Time?”](#) by Heather Corn in *Ed. Magazine*, Spring/Summer 2024 (#174, pp. 48-49); Taylor can be reached at [eric\\_taylor@gse.harvard.edu](mailto:eric_taylor@gse.harvard.edu); the full study, [“Teachers’ Use of Class Time and Student Achievement”](#) co-authored with Simon Burgess and Shenila Rawal, appeared in *Economics of Education Review*, 2023.

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### 3. Teachers' Reactions to a Nationwide Math Assessment in Austria

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Jeff Murray says “teaching to the test” is often associated with the following problems:

- A narrowed curriculum;
- Less teacher autonomy and creativity;
- Low-rigor, worksheet-driven instruction;
- Bored, unmotivated students.

Murray reports on a study of high-school math assessment in Austria that has intriguing implications for teaching to a test.

Until recently, Austrian math teachers were required to give an end-of-senior-year exam that met certain criteria, but teachers were allowed to create their own tests. Teachers sent their exams to their local education authority for approval, but they were rarely challenged. The result was that students in every senior-year math class took a different final test, depending on their teachers' priorities, and students' results couldn't be compared, even within the same school.

In 2014, a policy decision was made to mandate the use of a nationwide math leaving exam created by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research. It has four sections: algebra and geometry; functional dependences; analysis; and probability and statistics. The test items assess aptitude with technology, and students are allowed to use technological aids such as GeoGebra and graphing calculators.

Researchers interviewed a number of veteran Austrian math teachers who had previously created their own exams and were now giving the new common assessment. Virtually all the teachers supported the goal of standardization, saying the competencies measured by the national exam were the right ones for students. Support for the test has grown since it was introduced, reflecting increased familiarity with its content and acceptance that the old system wasn't coming back.

There have been some complaints about how much notice teachers have of year-to-year changes in what is covered. But teachers' main concern was the exam's impact on pedagogy. Now they felt like “trainers” working to prepare students to pass someone else's test. This meant being careful to cover the tested items in class, which limited their ability to teach other topics they'd taught for years. Students, anxious about their scores, protested when teachers spent time on non-tested topics. Many teachers stopped using textbooks and focused on problem sets aligned to the national exam. They got students using technology more often, although some taught the concepts first, then had students practice with calculators.

Despite these concerns, the study found three positive outcomes to the national exam. First, teachers collaborated more closely with other math teachers, especially within schools, with the common mission of preparing students to do well on the test (some teachers reported competition between schools on whose students got higher scores). Second, there was increasing acceptance of the fact that the exam measured the right stuff and was worth teaching to. And third, as teachers figured out the expectations and adjusted to the tweaks made each

year, they found there was room for autonomy and creativity as they prepared their students for the common expectations.

[“Teaching to the Test’ Done Right? Evidence from Austria”](#) by Jeff Murray in *Education Gadfly*, May 21, 2024

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#### 4. Dilemmas Faced by Male Latino Teachers

In this *Harvard Educational Review* article, Michael Singh (University of California/Davis) reports on his study of eleven male Latino teachers as they navigated the tricky dynamics of serving as culturally relevant role models for students of color. All of the teachers went into the profession as a political act, determined to make a difference, especially for high-need students, and all were welcomed by their colleagues, who were happy to see male teachers of color who spoke Spanish. Here are three takeaways from the study:

- *Discipline expectations* – One of the teachers said that colleagues frequently sent “troublesome” boys to him and expected that he would solve their problems. This sometimes happened in the middle of a class, and he thought to himself, “Yo, lady, I’m teaching.” Several of the teachers interviewed, says Singh, “concluded that ‘working well’ with boys, or being able to ‘connect’ with students, was actually coded language for being able to control their behavior... Stereotypes that paint Latino men as macho fathers and patriarchs led the teachers in this study to be viewed as culturally relatable punishers and controllers of unruly boys.”

- *Cultural expectations* – The teachers in the study said that Latin students, especially boys, relished having a Latino male teacher with shared cultural knowledge, including memes, music, sneaker brands, and common experiences with U.S. Immigration authorities. “That look on their face when they realize that you know exactly what they’re talking about,” said one of the teachers, “it’s priceless.”

But this close affinity had a downside. Male students often assumed that disrespectful language about girls would be acceptable to these teachers. One teacher described a hallway encounter with two boys “saying the most raunchy things about a girl they’re checking out. Like terrible stuff. And I’m clearly in earshot. They know I can hear them... The thing that got me the most was when I confronted them, they gave me this look like as if it should have been fine. Like I was going to let them say all those things and not say anything.”

The teachers were asked if they had been in fights in their lifetimes; one said he had, and when asked about his reaction, said he had cried, conveying a very different set of emotions than the students were expecting. Teachers were frequently questioned about their girlfriends and asked for photos. “I don’t go down that road until I know they’re genuinely interested in me as a person, instead of checking to see if she’s ‘hot’ or whatever,” said one teacher. “I think male teachers need to tread very carefully in this area.”

Singh comments: “The teachers found that the students hoped the men would emulate what they believed was desirably masculine. However, this often came with problematic qualities of hegemonic manhood, including misogyny, sexual power, and the ability to physically dominate. Despite their commitment to gender justice, the Latino men teachers

acknowledged the possibility, and even temptation, to gain cachet with their students by allowing them to believe they were the epitome of a powerful manhood. Instead, these teachers aimed to use their presence in the classroom to disrupt problematic gender ideologies.”

• *Disrupting the image* – Five of the eleven teachers in the study identified as gay or queer, says Singh, and they saw opportunities to shift students’ stereotypes, “challenging the notion that Latino men should be valued for their potential to signal dominant traits of masculinity, such as authoritarian or (hetero)sexual power.” These teachers sometimes engaged in a kind of code-switching. “When I discipline,” said one, “I catch myself being more masculine, right? My voice gets deeper, and I catch myself performing those masculine tropes of a Mexican dad, right?... I tell kids, ‘I’m not asking you, I’m telling you. You’re going to sit down and do your work.’”

“The way I engage with masculinity,” said another teacher, “fights back against a patriarchy that gets queer and trans kids kicked out of their homes or even killed.”

Singh concludes: “For educators, this study describes how hegemonic notions of race, gender, and sexuality converge to influence how cultural relevancy is imagined and projected onto the bodies of teachers... As calls to increase the number of [male] teachers continue, there must be a conscious engagement with the ways justifications of this change are vulnerable to cooptation and compromise. A remedy to ward off cooptation is a steadfast commitment to the critical roots of culturally responsive pedagogy.”

“Toxic Masculinity Masking As Cultural Relevancy: Latino Men Navigating Heteropatriarchal Expectations of Manhood in the Teaching Profession” by Michael Singh in *Harvard Educational Review*, Summer 2024 (Vol. 94, #2, pp. 165-186); Singh can be reached at [michaelsingh@ucdavis.edu](mailto:michaelsingh@ucdavis.edu).

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## 5. This Year’s College Admissions Hunger Games

In this *New York Times* article, Daniel Currell says the competition for admission to selective colleges in 2023-24 was the worst ever because of a perfect storm of seven factors:

- There was a major increase in students vying for a few thousand slots in the Ivy-plus schools (the eight Ivies plus Stanford, M.I.T., Duke, and Chicago), rising from 175,000 applicants in 2002 to 590,000 in 2022;
- There was also an increase in the quality of applicants, with the number of students with perfect ACT scores rising from 134 in 2002 to 2,542 in 2023. There were also considerably more wealthy students, who are far more likely to attend elite colleges.
- Ground rules that previously obligated colleges to operate on the same calendar, and give students time to consider offers before committing, were swept away by a legal challenge, allowing the most powerful schools to do what they wanted.
- This resulted in an increase in the previously niche practice of early admission.

Officially, anyone can apply early, but in practice, because it involves rolling the dice without knowing about financial aid, “it’s priority boarding for first-class passengers,”

says Currell. At Barnard, early applicants have a one in three chance of admission; those applying on the regular schedule have a one in 20 chance.

- The pandemic resulted in students being able to apply without ACT and SAT scores, tripling the number who thought they had a shot at selective colleges. “More applications,” says Currell, “more market power for the schools, and, for the students, an even smaller chance of getting in.” Test-optional also meant that only students with scores above a college’s median score submitted their scores, which resulted in the median going up, making many colleges seem unattainable to many students, even though colleges would like to give a leg up to needy students with lower scores.
- The Supreme Court’s 2023 decision ended race-based affirmative action, leaving colleges scrambling for new ways to preserve diversity, and students unclear on what schools were looking for.
- The FAFSA financial aid debacle means that many students still don’t have the information they need to decide which college they can afford – if any – and they may not know well into the summer.

“These disparate changes had one crucial thing in common,” says Currell: “Almost all of them strengthened the hand of highly selective colleges, allowing them to push applicants into more constricted choices with less information and less leverage.” Colleges want to increase their “yield” – the status-bestowing percent of admitted students who attend – and are in a better position than ever to crank it up – which means more uncertainty for applicants, especially those who can’t pay the full tuition. “In 2024,” Currell says, “the only applicants who could be certain of an advantage were those whose parents had taken the wise precaution of being rich.”

He tells the story of a student with perfect ACT scores who fell in love with Duke, applied for early admission, was rejected, and had to scramble to figure out her options; she finally got into Dartmouth. Another student whose family had been homeless was waitlisted by Barnard and several other colleges and had a long wait until she was accepted with financial aid by Wesleyan. For these students, their “painful roller coaster of a year was over,” says Currell. “For so many other high-school seniors, the year of broken college admissions continues.”

Ivy-Plus school enrollment is less than one percent of the nation’s 15 million undergraduates, he says, and these schools are a small footnote in the bigger picture of college admissions. Including selective colleges that accept less than a quarter of applicants, we’re still talking about only six percent of college students. “The easiest way to alleviate the traffic jam at the top,” says Currell, “is to shift our cultural focus toward the hundreds of schools that offer an excellent education but are not luxury brands.” But elite schools have great power, he says, and concludes by suggesting what we cannot, won’t, and should do:

- We can’t “let them go off and agree on their own solution,” he says. “Antitrust law exist to prevent dominant players from setting their own rules to the detriment of consumers and competitors.”

- We won’t legislate national rules that govern admission. “Our systems are decentralized and it would take a miracle for Congress not to make things worse.”

- We should “hold the schools accountable for their processes and their decisions.” All schools – including the elites – should be required to clearly state their admissions criteria, tell in advance what attending will actually cost, and not be allowed to offer better odds to those who have the luxury of forgoing that information.

[“2024 Was the Year That Finally Broke College Admissions”](#) by Daniel Currell in *The New York Times*, May 5, 2024

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## 6. Should Decodable Texts Be Used in Primary-Grade Reading Classes?

In this online article, Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/Chicago) updates an earlier article on the use of decodable texts. Pointing to the sparse research on the subject since the 1980s, he comments, “truth be told, this collection of studies is a bit of a mess, with little evident agreement as to what decodable text is, what it should be compared with, and what learning outcomes should be expected.”

What is decodable text? It’s reading material, usually for the early grades, that sticks to words with regular phonetic spelling, like *pet*, *big*, *nap*, and *dot*, and avoids irregular words like *cow*, *pear*, *come*, and *bomb*. But how “regular” do words have to be to qualify for decodable texts? As children master an increasing number of spelling and pronunciation patterns, don’t those words qualify as decodable? Researchers don’t agree, making it hard to draw firm conclusions about the efficacy of decodable texts for reading instruction.

English is complex, says Shanahan; “the sounds associated with letters and letter combinations depend on the letter’s position in the syllables, morphology, and etymology.” Students have to learn, for example, that the letter *b* usually makes the /b/ sound, but sometimes is silent, as in *comb* and *bomb*. Decodable texts that avoid irregular words don’t help students master what’s called “statistical learning” – knowing that most of the time the letter *b* is /b/ in words – *big* and *bad*. “Presenting students with lots of decodable text,” says Shanahan, “text that’s much more regular than normal text, might mess up some of these cognitive calculations.”

Citing several of the most recent studies, Shanahan says that as part of primary-grade literacy classes, students should read a mix of decodable and non-decodable passages. “I think it’s okay to use decodable texts as part of phonics instruction,” he concludes, “but such practice should be limited, and even beginning readers should be reading (not just listening to) more than decodable texts.”

[“Should We Teach with Decodable Text?”](#) by Timothy Shanahan on *Shanahan on Literacy*, June 1, 2024; Shanahan can be reached at [shanahan@uic.edu](mailto:shanahan@uic.edu).

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## 7. Four Keys to Successfully Resolving Workplace Conflicts

“No matter what conflict you face, there will always be four dimensions that will make

it productive,” say Karin Hurt and David Dye in this *SmartBrief* article: connection, clarity, curiosity, and commitment. The details:

- *Connection* – Do we know each other as people, including each other’s values?

“Every conflict gets easier the more you know one another,” say Hurt and Dye, “understand one another’s perspectives, and see one another as human beings.” It’s very helpful if there’s a track record of helping each other in difficult situations (for example, covering for you when you have to leave early to deal with a sick child).

- *Clarity* – Do we have a shared understanding of outcomes and expectations? “When you get clear for yourself and help other people find their clarity,” say Hurt and Dye, “*now* you can have a more productive conflict conversation.”

- *Curiosity* – Are we genuinely interested in other perspectives and what’s possible? “It’s hard to be curious when you’re furious,” they say, but good questions can help the other person feel seen and begin to get to the root causes of the problem. Asking a well-worded question with the right tone can relieve stress and get the conversation on track. *Huh, you know, I never thought of it that way.*

- *Commitment* – Is there agreement on specific, actionable next steps and a time when you’ll check in to make sure things are on track? If not, the time trying to resolve the conflict will have been wasted, leading to heightened tensions. “The specificity makes it clear what everyone will do,” say Hurt and Dye. “You don’t leave it up to good intentions. The follow-up meeting makes it more likely that you will both keep your commitments, and it creates time to deal with the inevitable challenges that will disrupt your new plan.”

[“Leveraging 4 Dimensions of Better Conflict Conversations”](#) by Karin Hurt and David Dye in *SmartBrief*, May 24, 2024; their new book is *Powerful Phrases for Dealing with Workplace Conflict* (HarperCollins).

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## 8. Effective Closure for One-on-One Meetings

In this *Leadership Freak* article, Dan Rockwell suggests how to conclude one-on-one meetings in a way that “elevates energy” and maximizes positive follow-up. A few examples:

### Reflection:

- What’s clearer now than when we began this conversation?
- What’s shifting in your thinking?
- If you shared an important takeaway from our conversation with a friend, what would you tell them?

### Actionable follow-up:

- What’s your next step, now that the path forward is clearer?
- What’s your action plan?
- What can I ask you about the next time we meet?

### Forward movement:

- What might prevent forward movement? What do you want to do if that happens?
- What could you do more of? Less of?

- How can I support?

Affirmation:

- I'm confident you can make this work.
- Keep believing in yourself. You're moving in a positive direction.
- I look forward to our next conversation.

[“The Perfect Ending: 27 Ways to End One-on-Ones Effectively”](#) by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, May 31, 2024; Rockwell can be reached at [dan@leadershipfreak.com](mailto:dan@leadershipfreak.com).

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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 54 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  
ASCD SmartBrief  
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  
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)  
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  
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