

Marshall Memo 321

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

February 1, 2010

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Quotes of the Week

"I used to have four theories about raising children. Now I have four children and no theories."

Bill Moyers, quoted in "One Kid at a Time" by Carol Ann Tomlinson in *Educational Leadership*, February 2010 (Vol. 67, #5, p. 13)

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/current_issue.aspx

"Great teachers approach their craft with humility. They know there is no instructional strategy, textbook, lesson plan, classroom management approach, motivational method, or timetable that will work for every individual in the kaleidoscopic mix of learners they encounter daily. They know enough about theory and research to chart a course for learning, but they also know that the journey will almost never go as planned."

Carol Ann Tomlinson (*ibid.*)

"Our mantra is to catch them before they fall."

Emiko Nakamura, California principal (see item #7)

"Once schools made teacher competence synonymous with student control, it was inevitable that students would sense who was really in charge."

Martin Haberman (see item #1)

"N.C.L.B. had loose standards and tight prescriptions on what you have to do, and we want to flip that so instead we have very clear goals and a high bar but flexibility on how to get there."

Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education, in "Class Warrior" by Carlo Rotella in *The New Yorker*, Feb. 1, 2010, subscription required for e-link

"Numbers don't lie, but they don't tell the whole truth."

Arne Duncan (*ibid.*)

1. The Pedagogy of Poverty (an oldie but goodie article)

In this searing article published almost two decades ago, University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee professor Martin Haberman describes what he believed was standard practice in urban classrooms in those days. Ask yourself to what degree this list – and Haberman’s analysis of it – is still accurate today:

- Giving information
- Asking questions
- Giving directions
- Making assignments
- Monitoring seatwork
- Reviewing assignments
- Giving tests
- Reviewing tests
- Assigning homework
- Reviewing homework
- Settling disputes
- Punishing noncompliance
- Marking papers
- Giving grades

“Taken separately, there may be nothing wrong with these activities,” says Haberman. “There are occasions when any one of the 14 acts might have a beneficial effect. Taken together and performed to the systematic exclusion of other acts, they have become the pedagogical coin of the realm in urban schools. They constitute the pedagogy of poverty...” – what teachers, students, parents, and the community expect in classrooms. And they are supplemented and supported by out-of-classroom routines like record-keeping, parent conferences, staff meetings, and assorted school duties.

Haberman believes these practices are deeply embedded in inner-city schools because they appeal to key constituencies:

- *Those who didn’t do well in schools themselves* – “People who have been brutalized are usually not rich sources of compassion,” says Haberman. “...They generally find it easier to believe that they would have succeeded if only somebody had *forced* them to learn.”

• *Those who rely on common sense rather than thoughtful analysis* – The conventional wisdom says that “permissiveness” is the root cause of the nation’s educational problems, so it stands to reason that “back to basics” will solve those problems.

• *Those who fear people of color and the poor* – “Bigots typically become obsessed with the need for control,” says Haberman.

• *Those who have low expectations for people of color and the poor* – “They believe that at-risk students are served best by a directive, controlling pedagogy,” he says.

• *Those with limited pedagogical repertoires* – This, unfortunately, includes many school administrators, teachers, and others who make it their business to reform schools.

Haberman goes on to describe four syllogisms that he believes undergird the pedagogy of poverty:

- Teachers teach, students learn, so students and teachers are engaged in different activities.
- Teachers are in charge, students need to develop appropriate behavior, so when students follow teachers’ directions, appropriate behavior is being taught and learned.
- There is a wide range of differences among students, including handicapping conditions and debilitating home lives, so it’s inevitable that some students will end up at the bottom of the class and others will finish on top.
- Basic skills are essential, but students aren’t necessarily interested in basic skills, so directive pedagogy must be used to compel students to learn what they need to learn.

“Unfortunately,” says Haberman, “the pedagogy of poverty does not work... It is not supported by research, by theory, or by the best practices of superior urban teachers... Youngsters achieve neither minimum levels of life skills nor what they are capable of learning... The classroom atmosphere created by constant teacher direction and student compliance seethes with passive resentment that sometimes bubbles into overt resistance. Teachers burn out because of the emotional and physical energy that they must expend to maintain their authority every hour of every day.”

Perhaps the most ironic aspect of the pedagogy of poverty is that students come to expect it and punish teachers who try to deviate from it. “Examples abound of inexperienced teachers who seek to involve students in genuine learning activities and are met with apathy or bedlam, while older hands who announce, ‘Take out your dictionaries and start to copy the words that begin with *h*,’ are rewarded with compliance or silence.” In this way, through operant conditioning, students “actually control, manage, and shape the behavior of their teachers,” says Haberman. Teachers may believe they are responding to student needs when, in fact, “they are more like hostages responding to students’ overt or tacit threats of noncompliance and, ultimately, disruption.”

Urban teachers are rarely disciplined or fired because their students aren’t learning. “Instead,” says Haberman, “urban teachers are castigated because they cannot elicit compliance. Once schools made teacher competence synonymous with student control, it was inevitable that students would sense who was really in charge. The students’ stake in

maintaining the pedagogy of poverty is of the strongest possible kind: it absolves them of responsibility for learning and puts the burden on the teachers, who must be accountable for *making* them learn. In their own unknowing but crafty way, students do not want to trade a system in which they can make their teachers ineffective for one in which they would themselves become accountable and responsible for what they learn. It would be risky for students to swap a ‘try and make me’ system for one that says, ‘Let’s see how well and how much you really can do.’”

Haberman concludes with a detailed sketch of what urban schools should be doing – and what first-rate educators have always done. “For genuinely effective urban teachers,” he says, discipline and control are primarily a *consequence* of their teaching and not a *prerequisite* condition of learning.” Good teaching is best seen by what students are doing rather than in watching what the teacher is doing. Good teaching is happening when:

- Students are involved with issues they regard as vital concerns. “Difficult events and issues are transformed into the very stuff of the curriculum.”
- Students are involved with explanations of human differences. “Why are there rich people and poor people, abled and disabled, urban and rural, multilingual and monolingual, highly educated and poorly educated?”
- Students are being helped to see major concepts, big ideas, and general principles and are not merely engaged in the pursuit of isolated facts.
- Students are involved in planning what they will be doing. “Following directions – even perfectly – does not prepare people to make choices and to deal with the consequences of those choices,” says Haberman.
- Students are involved with applying ideals such as fairness, equity, or justice to their world.
- Students are actively involved in doing experiments, participating as a reporter, a role player, or an actor, constructing things.
- Students are directly involved in a real-life experience, including field trips, interacting with resource people, and work and life experiences – followed by thoughtful reflection.
- Students work in culturally and intellectually heterogeneous groups.
- Students are asked to think about an idea in a way that questions common sense or a widely accepted assumption, that relates new ideas to ones learned previously, or that applies an idea to the problems of living.
- Students are involved in redoing, polishing, or perfecting their work.
- Students are involved with the technology of information access.
- Students are involved in reflecting on their own lives and how they have come to believe and feel as they do.

In short, Haberman’s vision of good teaching is “a process of ‘drawing out’ rather than ‘stuffing in.’” But he is concerned about the chances of successful implementation, given the deeply embedded pedagogy of poverty. Things will change, he concludes, when people see partially educated youth as a crisis. “Graduates who lack basic skills may be unemployable and represent a personal and societal tragedy. However, graduates who possess basic skills but are

partially informed, unable to think, and incapable of making moral choices are downright dangerous. Before we can *make* workers, we must first *make* people. But people are not *made* – they are conserved and grown.”

“The Pedagogy of Poverty versus Good Teaching” by Martin Haberman in *Phi Delta Kappan*, December 1991

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2. Lessons from Effective Chicago Elementary Schools

In this *Education Week* article, Debra Viadero reports on a new book, *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago* (University of Chicago Press, 2010). This 15-year study compared Chicago’s most-improved 100 elementary schools with its least-improved 100. The study excluded magnet and gifted schools and looked at the value each school added (or didn’t add) in test scores and student attendance. The authors (Anthony Bryk, Penny Bender Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Stuart Luppescu, and John Easton) found that five ingredients were correlated with school success, irrespective of students’ family SES:

- *Strong leadership* – Principals who are “strategic, focused on instruction, and inclusive of others in their work.”
- *Outreach* – A welcoming attitude toward parents and connections with the community.
- *Development of professional capacity* – High-quality teaching staff, teachers’ belief that schools can effect change, and participation in high-quality professional development and collaborative work.
- *Culture* – A learning climate that is safe, welcoming, stimulating, and nurturing to all students.
- *Curriculum* – Strong instructional guidance and materials.

The researchers found that schools that were strong in all five areas were ten times more likely to have significant gains than schools that excelled only in one or two areas. Being weak in one area tended to exacerbate other weaknesses. For example, 30 percent of schools with one weak area – such as professional communities – stagnated, versus 47 percent of schools with two weak areas – such as professional communities and less robust teacher educational backgrounds. The study also found that despite changing political realities in the district – first, radical decentralization, then strong central-office initiatives under Paul Vallas and Arne Duncan – the key drivers of school success at the local level remained the same.

The study also found that among schools in neighborhoods with the highest concentration of problems – a high percentage of students living in public housing, high crime rates, fewer families going to church, and higher levels of child abuse, neglect, and homelessness – there were only a handful of success stories, and those were schools with exceptionally strong supports. “When the density of problems walking through the front door is so palpable every day,” says Bryk, “it virtually consumes all your time and energy and detracts from efforts to improve teaching and learning.” The authors believe schools like these need a Harlem Children’s Zone-type treatment – an integrated set of community, school, and

wraparound social services. “It’s going to be a pretty bold effort to turn those schools around,” said Sebring, “but it can be done, and it should be done.”

“Chicago Study Teases Out Keys to Improvement” by Debra Viadero in *Education Week*, Jan. 27, 2010 (Vol. 29, #19, p. 1, 9), e-link for subscribers only

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3. Marilyn Burns on Math Interviews

(Originally titled “Snapshots of Student Misunderstanding”)

In this thoughtful *Educational Leadership* article, math consultant and author Marilyn Burns makes the case for conducting selective and carefully orchestrated one-on-one interviews with students to assess their understanding more deeply and accurately than is possible with tests and written work. “This information is essential for guiding appropriate instructional decisions,” she says, comparing it to the insights that reading teachers gain from individual reading assessments. Here are four vignettes:

- *Place value* – Burns asks first-grader Jonah to put 14 tiles on the table and he does so accurately. He also writes the number 14 correctly, and he knows that there are more than 10 tiles. “If you give me 10 of the 14 tiles,” Burns asks, “will there be extras?” Again, Jonah knows the answer. But Burns’s next question, “How many extras will there be?” throws him. He finally says, “I’m not sure. Maybe 2 or 3.” Clearly he doesn’t understand the structure of the base-10 number system. Students like this need lots of opportunities to count quantities of objects, group them into tens, and record how many there are. For videos of interviews on this topic, see <http://www.mathsolutions.com/placevalue/Cena>.

- *Missing addends* – Burns shows second-grader Rosa two tiles and asks, “How many more do I need so I have 10 tiles?” Rosa confidently responds, “You need 8 tiles.” Burns asks, “How did you figure out the answer?” Rosa replies, “It’s easy. I know that 8 plus 2 makes 10.” Burns then shows a picture of a jar with 30 marbles in it. “Can you figure out in your head how many more marbles I need to put into the jar so there are 100?” Rosa quickly says 70 and explains, “I know that 7 plus 3 makes 10, so 70 plus 30 makes 100.” Then Burns shows her five tiles and asks, “Figure out in your head how many more tiles I need so I have 30 tiles in all.” This one stumps Rosa. She counts by fives on her fingers but doesn’t know what to do with the answer she gets. “This one is hard,” she says. “I don’t think that six is right.” Rosa understands the structure of missing-number problems, but she’s not facile with number facts beyond ten. She, and students like her, need practice with different number combinations, expanding their numerical comfort range.

- *Interpreting remainders* – Burns asks fifth-grader Randy how many cars are needed to take 30 students on a field trip if four students can fit in each car. Randy uses long division and answers, 7 R 2. “How many cars are needed to fit all the students?” “It’s 7 remainder 2.” Randy was unable to apply a mathematically correct answer to a real-life situation. He, and students like him, need to work with division problems and making sense of them in the real world.

- *Estimating the sum of fractions* – Burns asks sixth-grader Heidi to say whether $1/3 + 2/5$ is greater or less than 1. After a moment's thought, Heidi says, "Less than 1." "How did you figure that out?" asks Burns. Heidi explains that she added the two tops and the two bottoms and $3/8$ is less than one. "Sometimes correct answers hide misconceptions or gaps in learning," says Burns. "... If we don't ask students to explain their reasoning, we can't be sure how they are reasoning or what they truly understand... Too often, we probe students' thinking only when they answer incorrectly... What is missing is the opportunity to give all students the experience of communicating how they reason, an important aspect of their math learning."

"Snapshots of Student Misunderstanding" by Marilyn Burns in *Educational Leadership*, February 2010 (Vol. 67, #5, p. 18-22); Burns can be reached at mburns@mathsolutions.com; article at http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/current_issue.aspx

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4. Fair and Accurate Grades for Exceptional Learners

(Originally titled "Grading Exceptional Learners")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, University of Kentucky/Lexington professors Lee Ann Jung and Thomas Guskey point out ways in which classroom grading can be inaccurate and unfair, especially for exceptional learners. To varying degrees, teachers give extra points for effort or improvement, meeting individual goals, good behavior, and so forth. In addition, many teachers labor under these misconceptions:

- That ELLs and students with IEPs can't be given a failing grade.
- That report cards may not identify students' status as exceptional learners.
- That transcripts can't identify the curriculum as being modified.
- That getting higher grades improves students' self-esteem.

Not true! say Jung and Guskey. They believe the last is the most dangerous, because self-esteem increases only when good grades accurately reflect achievement.

To be fair and accurate, grades must (a) describe students' performance compared to clearly articulated standards, and (b) distinguish between *product* (what students know and are able to do), *process* (effort, class participation, behavior, work habits, etc.), and *progress* (how much students have grown from a baseline). Report cards that meet these criteria are far more helpful to students and parents.

Jung and Guskey then outline steps that instructional teams should go through to fairly and accurately grade exceptional students:

- First, ask whether the standard is appropriate without adaptations. Specifically, can we expect the student to meet this goal without special support – or without altering the standard?
- Second, if the standard is not appropriate, determine what type of adaptation is needed – *accommodation* (the method of demonstrating mastery is adjusted) or *modification* (the standard needs to be changed).
- Third, if the standard needs modification, decide on what the student can reasonably achieve by the end of the year with special supports and record it in the 504 or ELL plan.

- Fourth, if the standard is modified, base grades on the modified standard.
- Fifth, communicate what the grade means by explicitly saying on the report card that it's based on modified standards and direct parents to more detailed explanations.

“Grading Exceptional Learners” by Lee Ann Jung and Thomas Guskey in *Educational Leadership*, February 2010 (Vol. 67, #5, p. 31-35); Jung is at ljung@uky.edu and Guskey at guskey@uky.edu; article is at http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership.aspx

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5. Tuning in to Students’ “Currencies”

(Originally titled “Start Where Your Students Are”)

In this *Educational Leadership* article, consultant/author Robyn Jackson suggests that many adult-student classroom conflicts and failures-to-connect come from teachers not focusing on the “currency” that motivates and engages students. Some examples:

- When Jackson taught AP English, she was unsuccessful at getting students to sign up for the test using standard arguments – it will help you in college, it’s a capstone to your high-school years, etc. Then she tried a different approach – starting a competition among her three AP classes to see which class could get the most test takers. “All of a sudden, students were racing to sign up for the test,” says Jackson. “Within a week, 95 percent of my students had signed up.” The win-win was connecting with something the kids valued – competition and the camaraderie of being in the winning class.

- For many teachers, good grades are a valued “currency.” But for many adolescents, the approval of friends is a priority. A teacher who recognizes this can set up a classroom culture in which students push one another to do their best – and end up getting good grades. “Understanding your currencies helps you withhold judgment and abandon the idea that your preferred currency is more valuable than those of your students,” says Jackson.

- A teacher was being driven crazy by a boy who kept interrupting her during instruction with comments and questions. At a parent conference, the teacher noticed that the boy’s parents talked over each other all the time. “It was how they processed information,” says Jackson. “They thought aloud. At the same time. Loudly.” Once the teacher realized this, she was less annoyed by the boy’s interruptions and had him keep a journal during class discussions to capture his thoughts and then pick one or two to share. Eventually he was able to do without the journal and participate appropriately in discussions.

“When you recognize and honor students’ currencies,” concludes Jackson, “you don’t abandon your own. Rather, you find a common currency that you both carry. This creates a safe place for both you and your students to be who you are... You create spaces for students to leverage who they are and what they know to access the curriculum.”

“Start Where Your Students Are” by Robyn Jackson in *Educational Leadership*, February 2010 (Vol. 67, #5, p. 6-10); Jackson can be reached at robyn@mindstepsinc.com; article is at http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/feb10/vol67/num05/Start_Where_Your_Students_Are.aspx

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6. Teaching Insights from Computer Games

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Jeffrey Young says that computer games have evolved through three stages. First came Edutainment, in which fun was more important than education. Then there were Serious Games like *Darfur is Dying* and *Global Conflicts: Palestine*, which suffered from not being much fun to play. Now we have Smart Gaming, which picks appropriate subject matter and tries to balance substance and sport. Successful games in this generation have several things to teach us about teaching:

- *Give frequent, detailed feedback.* Successful video games display a scoreboard with real-time information on the gamer's status. "What kids do in entertainment games," says Jan Plass of NYU, "is they say, 'I need to work on my stealth or my potion-making skills' or whatever. It's part of that drive to know yourself – what you're good at and what you're not good at." That's hard for teachers and professors to match, but even giving sub-grades on papers is a step in the right direction – this part was A work, this part was failing – is much more helpful than an overall C.

- *Test before going live.* Computer companies watch hundreds of clients using a new software product and do endless fine-tuning before putting it up for sale. Teachers and professors can't do that, but even monitoring one student as he or she takes a course – What caused difficulty? What misconceptions cropped up? – yields valuable insights.

- *Use captivating narratives.* "Stories are powerful ways to engage people," says Constance Steinkuehler of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, "and an immersive story line is one reason players of World of Warcraft work so hard to solve puzzles in the game." Creating an engaging scenario can help make "boring" material palatable.

- *Don't be afraid of fun.* Learning important content needn't be drudgery, says Young. As long as the content is learned, zany game-type formats can work.

- *However, not every subject works as a game.* "Blindly throwing games at an instructional problem is not a good solution," says Brett Shelton of Utah State University. James Paul Gee of the University of Wisconsin agrees: "It has to be a good game, and you want deep learning with assessment closely married to the learning. It's a double challenge."

"5 Teaching Tips for Professors – From Video Games" by Jeffrey Young in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jan. 29, 2010 (Vol. LVI, #20, p. A15), no e-link available

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7. Response to Intervention as a Strategy for ELLs

In this *Education Week* article, Mary Ann Zehr reports on the way Response to Intervention (RTI) is being used to improve results for English language learners in the Chula Vista, CA schools. Deputy Superintendent John Nelson III believes that RTI has been especially helpful in changing teachers' thinking from *I taught it, and it's their fault if they didn't get it to I need to keep teaching it and supporting students.*

This district emphasizes Tier 1, striving to make initial instruction work for all students, including ELLs, by using appropriate differentiation, repetition, visuals, and student

interaction. “[T]he big bulk of the day has to work with the majority of kids,” says Douglas Fisher, a San Diego State University professor who consults with the district. “You can’t take a school with 400 kids and have 100 in intervention.” One classroom strategy is giving students sentence frames to practice language and build vocabulary and content knowledge – for example, having students copy *The _____ lives in a _____*, and then work in pairs to fill in words that make sense (for example, *The sheep lives in a barn*). Some ELLs find this challenging and it can be used to teach key skills and vocabulary.

Tier 2 consists of small-group help for students who are still having problems after good initial instruction. Teachers work in more intense settings to get these students up to speed – for example, a number of first and second graders in one school attended a reading clinic for 17 weeks and made significant progress.

Tier 3 is even more focused instruction, usually one-on-one, but not necessarily special education. The district is concerned that language barriers not be mistaken for learning disabilities. “Our mantra is to catch them before they fall,” said Emiko Nakamura, the school’s principal.

“Tailoring Lessons for English Learners” by Mary Ann Zehr in *Education Week*, Jan. 27, 2010 (Vol. 29, #19, p. 1, 10), <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2010/01/27/index.html> with registration

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8. The Benefits of Having Recess Before Lunch

In this *New York Times* article, Tara Parker-Pope reports on an idea being implemented by some schools: scheduling recess before lunch (about 95 percent of schools have recess after lunch). Recess-first schools are noticing a number of benefits: much quicker lining-up at the end of recess, not as many items left behind on the playground, fewer behavior problems in the cafeteria, less food waste, higher consumption of milk, water, fruit, and vegetables, less throwing up, and fewer nurse visits for headaches and other complaints. “Kids are calmer after they’ve had recess first,” says New Jersey principal Janet Sinkewicz. “They feel like they have more time to eat and they don’t have to rush. All the wiggles are out.” One Arizona district said that shifting recess added fifteen minutes of instructional time each day because students were not coming to class straight from recess.

Schools shifting to pre-lunch recess have had to make some changes: dealing with the traffic flow of students who need to return to classrooms, lockers, and bathrooms as they come in from recess; dealing with coats and outdoor footwear in cold weather; distributing lunch passes as students come in from recess; making hand sanitizers available; and teaching children to eat more slowly, since they have gotten into the habit of wolfing down their food to get out to recess faster.

“Play, Then Eat: Shift May Bring Gains at School” by Tara Parker-Pope in *The New York Times*, Jan. 26, 2010 (p. D1, 6)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/26/health/26well.html?scp=2&sq=Play,%20Then%20Eat:%20Shift%20May%20Bring%20Gains%20at%20School&st=cse>

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 37 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 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 about 50 issues a year).

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Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Catalyst Chicago
Chronicle of Higher Education
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
New York Times
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teacher Magazine (online)
Teachers College Record
The Atlantic Monthly
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