

Marshall Memo 739

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

June 4, 2018

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Quotes of the Week

“Enjoy screens. Not too much. Mostly with others.”

Anya Kamenetz's advice to parents on children's time with electronic devices, quoted in “Screening Screen Time” by Pamela Druckerman, in a *New York Times* review of *The Art of Screen Time* and *Be the Parent, Please*, April 15, 2018

“Everyone wants to be noticed, and a little goes a long way.”

Jennifer Gonzalez on principals recognizing effective teaching (see item #1)

“I've never met a single student who could shake off the limitations of urban culture. This culture demands of us a performance – a way of existing in the world that ensures our bodily safety first, but makes us prone to behaviors that undermine our learning. I see it in the exaggerated maleness, or the spurning of education. I see it in the anger directed at students who are smart, or the ways violence is celebrated in the classroom. None of these behaviors make for a strong student. But for the urban student, actions that seem unruly to educators are effective – indeed necessary – ways of surviving.”

Edyson Julio (see item #2)

“[S]chool discipline brings into play a number of important but often competing goals for school districts: eliminating discrimination, protecting the learning time of both disruptive students and their well-behaved peers, upholding high expectations for students, empathizing with traumatized students, and defending the authority of teachers.”

Michael Petrilli (see item #3)

“I quite often hear adults remark that they hated history when they were in high school, but love it as adults.”

Melissa Hodgson (see item #5)

1. Dealing with the Green-Eyed Monster in Schools

“One of the most painful experiences of my teaching career had nothing to do with difficult students,” says Jennifer Gonzalez in this *Cult of Pedagogy* article. It was when her principal announced he was moving her to a seventh-grade teaching position and a colleague marched into her classroom: “I just have one question for you,” said the teacher. “What gives you the right to take a position from someone else who it was promised to for years before you even started teaching here?” The conversation didn’t end well, and for months afterward, Gonzalez got the cold shoulder from a number of colleagues. “It hurt,” she says. “More than I even wanted to admit.” She avoided the teachers’ lounge, didn’t reach out to colleagues, and kept her mouth shut in staff meetings.

This incident was followed by two others where Gonzalez was seen as the principal’s favorite: being recruited for a special committee to research and share effective classroom practices, and being moved to a classroom in a newly constructed wing of the school. Over a ten-year period, being seen as the “principal’s pet” had a negative effect on her work. “I didn’t value relationships with my colleagues,” says Gonzalez. “I didn’t put time, energy, or creativity into building bonds with other teachers. Instead, I poured everything I had into my students, into the quality of my own work, into the pursuit of pedagogical excellence. I didn’t realize how much happier my work life could have been if I had put even a fraction of that time into building better relationships with my peers.”

Looking back, Gonzalez knows she didn’t create the problem, but she has advice on how teachers might be able to avoid or at least mitigate this dynamic:

- *Prioritize relationships with co-workers.* These are ultimately more important to job satisfaction than good rapport with the principal. Attend social functions, talk about non-school topics, and open up about yourself.

- *Show your flaws.* “It’s hard to get close to someone who seems to have it all together, all the time,” says Gonzalez. “Be vulnerable. Ask for help.” Lots of colleagues have things to teach you and are happy to be asked.

- *Validate colleagues’ feelings.* “Other teachers’ relationships with students, parents, and administrators are not the same as yours,” says Gonzalez. “And what you might perceive as negativity from them probably has a long and complicated history behind it. So listen more than you talk, reflect what you’re hearing, and really try to see things from the other person’s point of view.”

- *Use your powers for good.* If you feel you’re being given preferential treatment, say something. And if colleagues are being treated unfairly, support them with the administration.

- *Don't avoid the teachers' lounge.* Doing so only isolates you. "Sit and eat and make an effort to be brave," says Gonzalez.

She also has suggestions for school leaders on how to avoid the mistakes her principal stumbled into:

- *Make staff relationships a priority.* When school leaders don't play an active role in nurturing collegiality (orchestrating informal get-togethers, celebrating teachers on a personal level), teachers tend to "clique up," says Gonzalez, "sticking only to their small circle of friends, and this is a fertile breeding ground for teachers to feel isolated and shunned, even when they're not." Researchers have shown a strong link between positive workplace relationships and teachers' mental and physical health.

- *Be transparent with decision-making.* Things might have been different if Gonzalez's principal had opened up the seventh-grade position, the committee, and the brand-new classrooms to all teachers and had an open selection process.

- *Praise privately.* Teachers aren't motivated when a colleague is praised in front of others. "Everyone wants to be noticed," says Gonzalez, "and a little goes a long way." Private conversations and notes with specific appreciation are best.

- *Avoid hand-picked committees.* "Instead, share your vision with the whole staff, no matter how cranky you think most of them are, and open up the opportunity to anyone who's interested," advises Gonzalez. "You may end up with the same group of people in the end, but at least you gave everyone a chance."

- *Sound out ideas with everyone.* "It's more comfortable to seek feedback from people whose company you enjoy, who share your philosophy about teaching, and whose work you respect and admire," says Gonzalez, "– people who *like you back*. But when you really want to know how a new idea is going to fly or what problems are happening under your radar, you need to actively seek out feedback from other teachers as well as teachers with whom you do have a relationship." What's more, you might get some good suggestions.

"The Principal's Pet: A Cautionary Tale" by Jennifer Gonzalez in *The Cult of Pedagogy*, July 8, 2015, <https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/principal-favoritism/>

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2. Teaching the Nation's Most Challenging Students

In this article in *Ed. Magazine*, Edyson Julio says that in his work with justice-involved youth in prisons and public high schools, "I've never met a single student who could shake off the limitations of urban culture. This culture demands of us a performance – a way of existing in the world that ensures our bodily safety first, but makes us prone to behaviors that undermine our learning. I see it in the exaggerated maleness, or the spurning of education. I see it in the anger directed at students who are smart, or the ways violence is celebrated in the classroom. None of these behaviors make for a strong student. But for the urban student, actions that seem unruly to educators are effective – indeed necessary – ways of surviving." Julio calls this pattern of behavior PTS – Performing to Survive.

In his own elementary and middle school years in the Bronx, PTS was Julio's facade. "Though I was an apt student," he says, "– versed in history, clear in my writing – I was really afraid to be so publicly." He read literature voraciously at home – Shakespeare, Morrison, Kafka – but it didn't feel safe to show that in school, and so he performed according to the script. "Very few teachers understood the need for this performance," he says. "Those that didn't actually shamed me for it." His bravado made him feel safer but led to multiple suspensions and an arrest. During his eighth-grade year, he brought a switchblade to school and his mother had had enough. She started working 20 hours of overtime a week to send him to a private high school, and he went on to college and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He teaches at Rikers Island and in several New York City alternative high-school programs.

Julio believes empathy was the key to his survival – essential to getting why his mother beat him "viciously" as a child, to understanding the characters in books he read who were so removed from his own experience, to creating characters in his own fictional writing. At one point he asked himself, "What was any of this worth if some of us were dying, being shot, jailed indefinitely, and failing out of schools?" Those questions called him to action and led to the creation of the Writing the Other Self curriculum. In classrooms, he started asking students "to challenge their own inflexibility... to reimagine themselves outside of the rigidity of the PTS experience." One gang-involved student wrote a new identity for himself as a musician and worked hard at writing about this new self and practicing the piano. "This was a miracle for this particular student," says Julio. "I then challenged him to inhabit the new character over the weekend, and so he asked his mom to take him to a jazz museum in Harlem. It was something he would never have done otherwise, away from the dangers of his housing project in Brooklyn."

Julio also asks students to give themselves a new name. This parallels the monikers many have in the hood and in prison, but leads them in a different direction. One young man took on the French name Jean and became so entranced with his self-fashioning that he decided to learn French. "It was a crisp and immediate reminder of how far we could go to change ourselves," says Julio. His students have written scripts in their new identities, experimenting with different vocabularies that serve them well in their courses and in job interviews. One student asked if they could have an acting coach visit the class to teach them new gestures, voice inflections, and walking styles. "He literally wanted his second identity to be an entirely new person," says Julio.

"The Other Self" by Edyson Julio in *Ed. Magazine*, Summer 2018 (Issue #160, p. 36-42), <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/18/05/creating-another-self-survive>

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3. Seeking Middle Ground on School Discipline

In this *Education Week* article, Michael Petrilli (Thomas B. Fordham Institute) says he's concerned about "the lack of common sense and evidence-based consensus" in the

ongoing school-discipline debate in Washington. “Regardless of what happens at the federal level,” he says, “school discipline brings into play a number of important but often competing goals for school districts: eliminating discrimination, protecting the learning time of both disruptive students and their well-behaved peers, upholding high expectations for students, empathizing with traumatized students, and defending the authority of teachers.” With these competing agendas in mind, Petrilli has these suggestions for school districts:

- *Address the part played by racial discrimination and implicit bias in disciplinary actions.* There’s no question, says Petrilli, that unconscious educator beliefs partly explain the overrepresentation of students of color in suspensions.

- *But don’t assume that racial bias is the only factor in disparities in discipline rates.* “Differences in student behavior are also a major factor,” says Petrilli. “That’s not because of the race of the students, but because, tragically, different racial groups face different kinds and degrees of trauma, abuse, and deprivation, many of them associated with poverty... It would be a miracle if children’s vastly different experiences didn’t result in behavioral differences in school.”

- *Show empathy for kids whose misbehavior stems from difficult life circumstances.* Educators need to understand the underlying causes and provide appropriate mental-health and other supports.

- *Don’t engage in the soft bigotry of low expectations.* “All students need to learn how to control their impulses and behave in acceptable ways,” says Petrilli, “as well as cultivate an attitude that reflects motivation and engagement.”

- *Don’t just send disruptive kids back to their classrooms.* One or two of these students can undermine the learning of an entire class, and they need more than a stern lecture.

- *Find ways to address misbehavior that lead to positive changes and protect opportunities to learn.* Out-of-school suspensions may be counterproductive; schools should experiment with in-school suspensions for non-violent offenses, combined with strategies to get at the roots of misbehavior.

- *Address “suspension factories.”* Thousands of public schools suspend more than one fourth of their students every year. But mandating that these schools “get their numbers down” is not the answer. Such schools need “massive amounts of support,” says Petrilli.

“A Fair and Effective Approach to School Discipline” by Michael Petrilli in *Education Week*, May 30, 2018 (Vol. 37, #33, p. 28), <https://bit.ly/2JehK68>; Petrilli can be reached at mpetrilli@edexcellence.net.

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4. A Connecticut Teacher Experiments with a Different Kind of Final Exam

“It’s all about process,” say high-school English teachers Jeffrey Schwartz and Benjamin Schwartz (father and son) in this article in *English Journal*. “Even product is process. Product is an arbitrary stopping point along a never-ending zigzag of growth, the same as our teenaged students’ ongoing lives.” Schwartz and Schwartz were struck by how often students exchanged unfinished thoughts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat

(“where messages appear swiftly on screens, longing for a reader’s response”) and yet in school they had to deal with the closure of final exams and grades.

Inspired by a 2016 exhibit of unfinished works of art at the Met Breuer Museum in New York City, the authors wanted to get students thinking of their writing as *always unfinished*. “How could we help make learning more visible?” they asked. “And what would that look like on a final exam?” Jeffrey Schwartz decided to design a new type of final exam for his ninth graders that, for the first time, included elements of process, and then proceeded to plan the year backwards with that exam in mind.

“Because writing is recursive and generative,” say Schwartz and Schwartz, “every word we write opens new possibilities. Not only that, but writing is influenced by ability, time allowed, task definition, rhetorical situation, relationship to reading, and helpful thinking strategies that could include talk and drawing, as well as informal writing-to-learn. Throw in technology, socioeconomic differences, class size, and individual learning styles – among other influences – and we can appreciate the challenges for teachers.” Assessing this mind-boggling list of variables, two seemed most important, and here’s how they played out in Jeffrey Schwartz’s classes during the 2016-17 school year:

- *Writing as a tool for thinking* – Throughout the year, students were constantly writing to learn – on note cards, in confidential computer files, in ungraded discussion threads, in the back of their books, in drafts of essays and poems, and in graded blog entries. “The point was always to discover something new through writing informally about literature, experience, or the startling world of current events,” say Schwartz and Schwartz. The only criteria were “to be thoughtful, to show evidence of close reading, and to write with an honest sense of voice.”

- *Ongoing assessment* – After each major assignment and at the end of each quarter, students were asked to stop and reflect on strengths and areas for improvement in all their writing, including informal jottings. The goal was to make learning visible because, say the authors, “To be successful, agile writers, they need to be able to assess their own work, set goals, develop strategies, and see growth.”

What kind of year-end assessment would allow students to demonstrate their understanding of process and their growth as writers? For starters, it couldn’t be a two-hour sit-down exam. “Writers needed two weeks, not two hours,” say Schwartz and Schwartz. “It was crucial to have time to think, talk, rehearse, plan, map, draft, re-read, gather evidence, share with readers, and revise. Above all, students had to wrestle, that is, to think deeply about ideas. They had to inquire into their own questions and discover something new.”

The two-week exam process began the day final portfolios were due and challenged students to compose an essay exploring some key questions, including, *What has baffled you this year?* They had to synthesize ideas from a variety of sources (articles, TED talks, poems, assemblies, guest speakers, political events), rethink the literature they’d read during the year, and choose one text from each semester connected to an issue of personal relevance. These were the ground rules for the exam process:

- You must care about your topic.

- You must pose a meaningful question, stay open to complication, and wrestle with your topic.
- You must use a thoughtful writing process, including exploration (notes, talking, visual mapping, blog response writing), a flexible plan, drafting/revising, and final editing.
- Your writing must show your engagement and sense of voice.

Among the topics students chose: family, pride, feminism, toxic relationships, peer pressure, racism, becoming an ally, the courage to speak up, and self-realization.

For a week and a half, students explored, planned, and drafted, bouncing ideas off partners, small groups, and Jeffrey Schwartz, also thinking about the audience for their essay. Then each class convened in the two-hour final exam period, but instead of writing silently, they used the time for lively peer-response discussions, revisions, and drafting an individual process statement.

“The final exam in 2017 was, for Jeff, the most successful he had given in 40 years of teaching,” say Schwartz and Schwartz. “Not only was it the most authentic in terms of assessing complex process, but it also allowed students to produce their most engaging writing. They chose meaningful topics, wrestled with authentic and open-ended thinking questions, probed ideas, connected them to personal experiences, took their time using strategies they learned, and – in most cases – completed their best work. Students were justifiably proud.” The process statements unanimously lauded this type of final exam, saying it was challenging but less stressful and far more meaningful personally than a traditional test. They appreciated the open-ended, unfinished, risk-taking process. The authors believe the original goal was met: “Learning, for us *and* for our students, is never finished.”

“In Praise of the Unfinished” by Benjamin Schwartz and Jeffrey Schwartz in *English Journal*, May 2018 (Vol. 107, #5, p. 60-65), access for NCTE members at <https://bit.ly/2JtSuMB>; the authors are at bbschwartz@kingschoolct.org and jschwartz@greenwichacademy.org.

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5. Bringing History Alive

“I quite often hear adults remark that they hated history when they were in high school, but love it as adults,” says New Jersey social studies supervisor Melissa Hodgson in this article in *Educational Viewpoints*. How can we make history more engaging for students? Hodgson summarizes four strategies used by effective teachers:

- *Zero in on the most important content.* One thing that makes history deadly is when teachers feel the need to rush through vast amounts of content to cover standards and prepare students for every possible exam question. The key issue is whether a particular piece of information is important to students understanding the overall topic. Compare these two 45-minute lessons in a unit on World War II:

- Students fill out a chart of the 20 major battles of the war with dates, locations, and victors.
- Students get a chart of seven major WWII battles and work in pairs to investigate why these battles were important and rank them from most to least significant.

“A simple switch in instruction, where the breadth of content was decreased, changed engagement entirely,” says Hodgson. The second lesson got students investigating, talking, debating, and reasoning. For teachers who are hesitant about abridging content, she recommends teaching engaging lessons on the most important content and then offering enrichment classes and posting additional information and readings on the class website.

- *Lead frequent class discussions.* These are “a great way to engage students with content, assess for understanding, and improve speaking and listening skills,” says Hodgson. It’s important to prime the pump with a text, a set of documents, or a short video, accompanied by well-framed focus questions. Of course there’s always the danger of discussions veering off topic, becoming negative, or being dominated by a few talkative students, allowing others to coast. Teachers need to have clear expectations for what a quality discussion looks and sounds like, a rubric for assessing discussions, and good facilitation skills. It’s often a good idea to get students talking in small groups before all-class discussions.

- *Use primary-source documents.* Authentic documents help students understand that history “is filled with real people who had feelings, dreams, and setbacks just like them,” says Hodgson. Well-chosen documents can develop students’ empathy for people who lived long ago. There’s no comparison between plodding through a textbook chapter on the Civil Rights Movement and looking at a photograph of Elizabeth Eckford integrating Central High School while her classmates screamed at her, then reading Eckford’s account of what that day was like. The latter lesson, with the teacher asking what those teenagers were thinking and feeling, powerfully conveys what happened and why it happened.

- *Connect the past with the present.* “Just when you thought you could pare down your lesson on Populism, the 2016 election happened!” says Hodgson. The essential question for a unit might be, *Does history repeat itself?*, with students researching current and archival evidence, debating in groups and as a whole class, and writing justifications for their positions.

“Four Quick Fixes for Increased Engagement in Secondary History Classrooms” by Melissa Hodgson in *Educational Viewpoints*, Spring 2018 (p. 49-51), no e-link available; Hodgson can be reached at mhodgson@mtsd.us.

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6. More Students Need Glasses!

In this *Education Week* article, Sarah Sparks and Alex Harwin report that (a) the number of young people who are nearsighted (need glasses to see distant objects) has increased markedly in recent years, and (b) almost one-third of U.S. schoolchildren have not had a vision screening in the last two years.

A 2017 report found that nearly 42 percent of Americans are nearsighted, compared with only 25 percent in the 1970s. Why the increase? Experts believe two factors are involved: young people spending more time engaged with “near work” (reading print material or mesmerized by electronic devices); and children spending less time outdoors in daylight during and after school (perhaps a result of schools cutting back on recess and parents’ concerns about neighborhood safety). Less exposure to natural light in the elementary school years speeds the

growth of the eyeball, which increases the incidence of nearsightedness. Studies in the U.S., Australia, and China have found a direct relationship between less time spent outdoors and more nearsightedness (although for children who have already begun to develop nearsightedness, more time outdoors doesn't arrest the process).

The American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology recommends that after age 5, children have their vision checked at least every other year, but there's wide variation across states, with children living in low-income communities less likely to have regular screening. Vision to Learn is a nonprofit working in 12 states to address this deficit. Seventy percent of the students screened recently by Vision to Learn who were found to need glasses had never had them, and another 20 percent had outdated prescriptions. Vision to Learn and other groups working with schools are moving away from traditional eye charts in favor of hand-held auto-refractors, which measure how light changes as it enters the eye. This technology is more effective than eye charts with younger and less verbal children.

"When the children finally get to the eye exam and are told they need glasses, it is often just a shock," says Damian Carroll, the group's national director. "The kid doesn't realize there's a problem because it's the way the world has always looked, and it's just not something parents first think of when the child is struggling in school." Better vision in classrooms leads to more successful schoolwork and also cuts down on discipline problems.

Once students have glasses, schools need to make sure they're worn every day, that students don't think they're nerdy, and that they immediately report if glasses are damaged or lost.

"A Growing Vision Problem Is Hidden in Plain Sight" by Sarah Sparks and Alex Harwin in *Education Week*, May 30, 2018 (Vol. 37, #33, p. 8-9), <https://bit.ly/2LW2kFi>

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7. Digital Self-Harm

In this *Education Week* article, Sasha Jones reports on a new online phenomenon – depressed and self-hating teenagers sending derogatory messages to their own social media accounts, basically cyberbullying themselves. In the 2013 case of a 14-year-old girl in England who ultimately committed suicide, 98 percent of the messages on a social-networking site were traced back to her own IP address.

"Just as youths who cut themselves can often hide their wounds and scars under clothing," says Jones, "digital self-harm is difficult to detect." A recent study in the U.S. found that six percent of middle- and high-school students admitted to cyberbullying themselves. "We should be deeply concerned that there are young people out there who are struggling and not getting the support that they need," said Data and Society researcher Danah Boyd.

What's behind this phenomenon? Perhaps it's a way of getting attention, being funny, or provoking a reaction. Or it could be something else. "There's almost a desperate hope of being able to manipulate people into giving you a second chance," says New York sociologist Laura Martocci. "If other people feel bad enough for me, if other people think that this is

what’s happening to me online, they might give me a second chance, and then I can show them that I can fit in.”

There have been some attempts by social-media companies, including Twitter, to screen and limit such messages and even refer people using trigger words (“I want to die” “Kill myself”) to mental-health agencies. But these efforts are a drop in the bucket, says Lynn Linde of the American Counseling Association: “It’s pretty much a free-for-all.”

“Schools See New Dilemma in Teens Who Cyberbully Themselves” by Sasha Jones in *Education Week*, May 30, 2018 (Vol. 37, #33, p. 18), <https://bit.ly/2LeAKIM>

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8. Three Simple Rules in a New York City Elementary School

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Robert Pondiscio fondly recalls the principal of the New York City elementary school where he began his teaching career. “She was as much the school’s mayor as its instructional leader,” says Pondiscio. She spoke fluent Spanish and knew every student and parent by name. And all students knew her three schoolwide rules by heart:

- Keep everyone safe.
- Get a good education.
- Ask for help if you need it.

Pondiscio remembers that the principal made a big deal of the third rule. Whenever a child said “three magic words” – *I need help* – the school’s commitment was that they would “command immediate adult attention and bring all other activities to a halt.”

“Students Don’t Always Listen to Adults, But They Never Fail to Imitate Them” by Robert Pondiscio in *The Education Gadfly*, May 30, 2018 (Vol. 18, #22), <https://bit.ly/2st6QTM>

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9. Short Item:

An interactive map of the displacement of Native Americans – This map shows the year-by-year takeover of land in what is now the United States (click the clock at the bottom):

<http://usg.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=eb6ca76e008543a89349ff2517db47e6>

“The Invasion of America,” 2014, a project of eHistory.org, project director Claudio Saunt, Russell Professor of History at the University of Georgia

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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 48 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Essential Teacher
Exceptional Children
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Literacy Today
Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Education Gadfly
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine