Marshall Memo 759

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
October 29, 2018

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"So much of being a principal requires you to be in the moment, centered, and focused on the other person you are working with. If you are tired and out of gas, that just doesn't cut it."

Mark Shellinger, National SAM Innovation Project, quoted in "'I Want a Job and a Life:' How to Find Balance in All-Consuming Work" by Denisa Superville in *Education Week*, October 17, 2018 (Vol. 38, #9, p. 8-10), https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/10/17/i-want-a-job-and-a-life.html

"The types of jobs that are at the *least* risk of being replaced by automation involve problem solving, teamwork, critical thinking, communication, and creativity… Equally important, these skills form a strong foundation for independent thinking that will serve students well no matter what career(s) they pursue throughout their lives."

Elizabeth Mann Levesque in "The Role of AI in Education and the Changing U.S. Workforce" in a Brookings Institution report, October 28, 2018, https://brook.gs/2J8awkM

"The lifeblood of a literacy program is real language as experienced in read-alouds, children's literature, opportunities to speak, listen, and write. Children also need to see teachers and parents take joy in literacy."

Daniel Willingham (see item #1)

"Dealing with negative people is never easy. It's never fun. But if you don't do it, nothing about your job is fun."

Todd Whitaker (quoted in article #9)

1. Daniel Willingham on the Reading Wars: Can't We All Just Get Along?

In this online article, Daniel Willingham (University of Virginia) responds to an article by Emily Hanford in the October 28th *New York Times* https://nyti.ms/2ELv9VD taking one side in the perennial debate between phonics and "whole language." Willingham invites us to look at six statements about learning to read:

1) The vast majority of children first learn to read by decoding sounds.
2) A very small percentage of children teach themselves to decode with very minimal input from adults; more can do so with a little support.
3) The speed with which most children learn to decode will be slower if they receive haphazard instruction in phonics; most need systematic phonics instruction.
4) Phonics instruction is not a literacy program. "The lifeblood of a literacy program is real language," says Willingham, "as experienced in read-alouds, children's literature, opportunities to speak, listen, and write. Children also need to see teachers and parents take joy in literacy."
5) Systematic phonics instruction might seem boring, but studies have shown that it doesn't harm children's motivation to read.
6) That said, phonics instruction can be overdone, and teachers need to make sure to emphasize the real-literature and affective dimensions of literacy.

"I think all of the six statements above are true," says Willingham. Zealots in the phonics/whole language war embrace only the odd- or the even-numbered items, but "they are ignoring abundant research and have above-average capacity to kid themselves." Many others agree that all the statements are true, but they want to emphasize the ones they're passionate about.

"The larger point," Willingham concludes, "is that the conflict is a waste of time and I suspect most people know it. There's plenty of other work to be done."

"Just How Polarized Are We About Reading Instruction?" by Daniel Willingham, October 29, 2018, http://www.danielwillingham.com/daniel-willingham-science-and-education-blog; Willingham can be reached at willingham@virginia.edu.

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2. An Interview with Donalyn Miller

In this interview with Larry Ferlazzo in *Education Week Teacher*, author/educator Donalyn Miller talks about her book, *Reading in the Wild,* and her thoughts on reading instruction. Some key points:

• *Should teachers read during silent reading periods?* Miller believes these are a prime opportunity to talk to students individually about what they are reading and help them set goals and position reading in a personal and academic context. "Conferring with students about what they are reading builds relationships and communicates to students that we care about their personal engagement and reading growth," she says. But occasionally she will read her own book, perhaps strategically positioning herself near students who need a little "proximity control."

• *Why is Miller critical of reading logs?* Miller is wary of these because students can so easily make entries without doing any real reading, and those students aren't making any progress. She advocates teachers holding regular reading conferences and reviewing students' records in their reading notebooks to see what is really going on. She also suggests that students keep a "reading itinerary," which helps them track where, when, and how much reading they are doing away from school and identify obstacles that prevent them from reading at home – often a lack of access to good books, not having a library card, or other barriers.

• *What about Accelerated Reader?* Miller says she knows of no independent, peer-reviewed research on the effectiveness of this program, and she is a skeptic. When she asks educators how they would spend the money budgeted to AR if they didn't have it, they tell her they'd buy more books for classrooms and libraries. She agrees.

• *Concerns about pullout remedial instruction?* Miller is against pulling students out during independent reading and library time. "Even children who are not at grade level mastery deserve full citizenship in the reading communities at their schools," she says. That's when they get to practice and apply instruction, experience the joy of reading, and connect with their peers around reading. The key to Response to Intervention, she says, is improving the quality of Tier One instruction, including ensuring daily reading time and access to good books. "When teaching practices improve," she says, "fewer kids fall into Tier Two and Three." In addition, she says, "All children deserve to see themselves and their families represented in books."

"Author Interview with Donalyn Miller: *Reading in the Wild*" by Larry Ferlazzo in *Education Week Teacher*, August 16, 2018, https://bit.ly/2OY1wVT

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3. Jennifer Gonzalez on Note-Taking

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, Jennifer Gonzalez reports on her perusal of three decades of research on the best way for students to take notes on:

- Classroom lectures;
- Videos in a flipped or blended environment;
- Assigned handouts or textbook chapters;
- Research for a project;
- Authentic tasks during a Genius Hour;
- Field trips.

These are all situations where students need to capture information for future reference. Gonzalez gained the following insights:

• *Note-taking helps students remember*. "The thinking behind this," says Gonzalez, "is that note-taking requires effort. Rather than passively taking information in, the act of encoding the information into words or pictures forms new pathways in the brain, which stores it more firmly in long-term memory." In addition, students can access their notes at other times to refresh and reinforce the information.

• *More-detailed notes are better*. Studies have found that detailed, comprehensive notes result in better learning. Brevity is not a virtue when it comes to retention.

• *Explicit instruction on note-taking strategies is helpful*. This is especially true for students with learning disabilities. The Cornell Notes system is an example of an effective strategy that can be taught. Having been exposed to different approaches and the rationale behind them, students could be encouraged to choose the one that works best for them.

• *Visuals boost the power of notes*. Sketches, diagrams, and drawings improve the memory of concepts, terms, and relationships.

• *Revision, collaboration, and pausing are effective strategies*. Teachers might consider stopping a lecture or video to give students a chance to review, consolidate, and chat about their notes up to that point.

• *Scaffolding increases retention*. One strategy is guided notes (a.k.a. skeleton or skeletal): the instructor provides an outline with spaces for students to fill in more detail as the lecture proceeds. A less-structured approach is providing verbal cues like, "This is an important point" or "Be sure to add this to your notes."

• *Providing instructor notes improves learning*. This would seem to do too much of the work for students, but it's helpful when students get complete, well-written, instructor-prepared notes *after* they've taken their own. Teachers can deal with students being tempted to not take notes (because they'll receive them at the end of the class) by (a) building in pair sharing of notes; (b) monitoring students' notes, either during or after the class; (c) giving a small grade for quality; and (d) sharing research with students about the power of the one-two approach.

• *Handwritten notes produce better retention than digital notes*. This has led some teachers and professors to forbid the use of laptops for note-taking. However, says Gonzalez, the research on this is quite young and there's an argument for allowing laptops so students learn how to deal with the temptations for multitasking that laptops continually present. Students might also be asked to experiment with both approaches and do action research on which results in better learning and retention.

"Note-Taking: A Research Roundup" by Jennifer Gonzalez in *The Cult of Pedagogy*, September 9, 2018, https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/note-taking/

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4. A Profile of a Well-Educated Person

In this report from Getting Smart/XQ Institute, Tom Vander Ark, Mary Ryerse, and co-authors present a blueprint for competency-based education. "Students who are deeply engaged in their own learning and fully prepared for all that the future has to offer," they say, have the following characteristics:

• Masters of all fundamental literacies:
  - Building the academic core necessary to prepare for college, career, and life;
  - Critical readers;
  - Compelling writers;
  - Mathematical and numeric thinkers;
  - Data and visual thinkers.

• Holders of foundational knowledge:
  - Curious people who are knowledgeable about the world, its history and culture, its sciences and underlying mathematics, its biology and cultural currency;
  - Engaged participants who are key to creating a more just and functional democracy – who participate fully in all America has to offer.

• Original thinkers for an uncertain world:
  - Sense-makers – dealing with conflicting knowledge;
  - Generative thinkers – creating many ideas in ambiguous and new situations;
  - Creative thinkers – reframing, imagining, and seeing problems from different perspectives.

• Generous collaborators for tough problems:
  - Self-aware team members who bring their strengths;
  - Talent-seekers who find the expertise of others;
  - Essential co-creators – because of what they bring, and how they show up;
  - Inquisitive world citizens who seek out – and respect – diversity and diverse points of view.

• Learners for life:
  - Self-driven, self-directed; curious learners – about themselves and the world;
  - Inventors of their own learning paths, careers, and lives.

"Show What You Know: A Landscape Analysis of Competency-Based Education" by Tom Vander Ark, Mary Ryerse, et al. from Getting Smart and XQ Institute, October 23, 2018
https://xqsuperschool.org/competency-based-education-cbe/part1

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5. Helping Young Men Push Back on "Locker-Room Culture"

In this *Education Week* article, Jeff Frank (St. Lawrence University) says that recent revelations of sexual harassment and assault have made some males fearful that they will be falsely accused. This fear makes it difficult for them to understand the very small risk of being wrongfully targeted and the very real harm done to victims.

"It is hard to educate someone in the grip of fear," says Frank. "Instead of teaching men to fear #MeToo, I hope that schools have the courage to carve out spaces for men to learn about other possible emotional responses to this movement." Here are four:

• *Disgust* – That is many people's reaction to "locker-room talk," objectifying females, sexual harassment, and assault. "Spaces in school should exist where men especially are allowed to call these things disgusting without fear of a harmful label," says Frank.

• *Shame* – Swept up in a culture of camaraderie and fellowship, young men can talk and act in disgusting ways. Reflecting on his words and actions, a young man may be ashamed and regretful, but not be able to process the emotions. "He should be able to admit he caused harm," says Frank, "because if a man is taught that it is not okay to make mistakes, he will spend a lifetime attempting to hide them. This often only compounds the harm he does to others and keeps him from taking responsibility for his own moral growth."

• *Responsibility* – Schools can help young men move beyond disgust and shame to taking constructive action to work against disrespectful behavior. "This hard work helps you become a decent person," says Frank, "and that should give you a sense of worth that doesn't require additional reward or recognition."

• *Solidarity* – As a young man moves away from disrespectful talk and actions and forms a better self-concept, he realizes that he stands shoulder to shoulder with many other men – and women.

"To be clear," Frank concludes, "the goal of this type of moral education is not to take anything away from men. Rather, the goal is freeing them from fear so that they can do the hard work of forming their sense of self in light of what they actually feel and believe, not what they are taught to fear."

"We Shouldn't Teach Young Men to Fear #MeToo" by Jeff Frank in *Education Week*, October 24, 2018 (Vol. 38, #10, p. 21), https://bit.ly/2z9oY7L

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6. Thinking Through the MET Project's Teacher-Evaluation Ideas

In this article in *Education Next*, Thomas Kane (Harvard Graduate School of Education) reflects on the reforms promoted by the Measures of Effective Teaching project, which he led. Kane outlines the analysis behind the initiatives:

- Research over four decades has shown that some teachers get much higher student achievement gains than others.
- The differences in children's outcomes are long-term as well as short-term.
- Before teachers begin their classroom careers, it's difficult to tell who will be effective and who won't; credentials and content knowledge explain little of the variation in teachers' subsequent student-achievement results.
- It is possible to identify effective teachers once they're hired, based on observable classroom practices and a track record of achievement gains.
- The fact that it's possible to predict teachers' long-term effectiveness only after they enter the classroom means that the teacher-evaluation process is very important.

- But historically, says Kane, teachers enjoyed a good deal of autonomy once they closed their classroom doors and were largely free of interference or meaningful management.
- "To keep up appearances," he continues, schools went through the motions of managing instruction, giving 98 percent or more of teachers "satisfactory" ratings and not connecting student outcomes with their teachers' evaluations.
- Principals made infrequent classroom evaluation visits and lacked comprehensive rubrics containing a shared vocabulary for judging teachers' performance.
- All this means that instruction was not seen as "a collective, organizational responsibility in most public schools," says Kane, and "when there is no collective responsibility for instructional quality, when each new generation of teachers must invent their own practice (drawing largely on the instructional methods they experienced as children), teaching cannot improve from one generation to the next. The closed classroom door may shield the flame of individual creativity early in a teacher's career, but, without the oxygen of external observation and feedback, the flame goes out."

The Gates-funded MET project sought to solve this set of problems by investing $215 million in a new approach to teacher evaluation in seven pilot districts and charter management organizations. The theory of action was that three enhancements would improve teaching and learning: (a) beefing up principals' classroom observations with detailed rubrics; (b) using value-added methodology (VAM) to make student outcomes part of teachers' evaluations; and (c) using data from anonymous student perception surveys of their teachers.

This was not just about firing low-performing teachers, says Kane: "We hoped that improving evaluation systems would lead to a cascade of positive organizational changes inside school agencies" and "engage the entire school community in the mission of instructional improvement" – this as a result of a shared vocabulary about good teaching contained in rubrics, insights from VAM and student surveys that would supplement principals' subjective assessments, and accountability and high standards to improve professional development and motivate everyone to work harder and smarter.

Kane notes the passionate resistance to MET reforms and a recent RAND report on disappointing student achievement in the MET sites (see Marshall Memo 744). Kane acknowledges the RAND finding, but says it's partly because most of the comparison sites were implementing the same teacher-evaluation reforms as the MET sites. He insists that the basic approach of the MET study has been vindicated in other studies, and it's not fair to say that better teacher evaluation "does not work." Reform in this area "was and remains essential," he says.

Kane goes on to make several recommendations about the design and execution of future initiatives and the role of philanthropy in K-12 schools. "During this post-ESSA limbo," he concludes, "the national philanthropies should be in tool-building mode, stocking the shelves with proven, implementable solutions for when states and local leaders are ready to resume their work."

[Kane's first six bullets make sense, but the subsequent analysis doesn't address the three basic design flaws of traditional teacher evaluation that led to grade inflation and weak impact on teaching and learning: (a) infrequent classroom visits, announced in advance, showcasing optimal rather than typical performance; (b) an emphasis on description, evidence, and evaluation versus coaching for improvement; and (c) principals spending hundreds of hours on an ineffective process rather than getting into classrooms and working with individual teachers and teams in ways that improve teaching and learning.

As for the MET reforms, all three parts of the logic model have been implemented in problematic ways. With classroom visits, detailed rubric-scoring of each visit consumes lots of administrators' time and undermines high-quality coaching conversations. Using test scores as part of teachers' evaluations has sparked fierce resistance because of the well-documented flaws with high-stakes use of VAM data at the individual teacher level. And student perception surveys, when used for high stakes, distort the process and miss a golden opportunity to use the insights of those who experience teachers' work every day to appreciate and improve practice.

In all three areas, some schools are using more-effective approaches: short, frequent, unannounced classroom visits with face-to-face coaching focused on one leverage point at a time, followed by very brief narrative summaries; frequent, low-stakes supervisory conversations about how students are doing on lessons, units, and assessments to fine-tune teaching; and teachers looking at their students' survey feedback twice a year with an administrator or a critical friend for affirmation and ways to improve practice. K.M.]

"Develop and Validate – Then Scale: Lessons from the Gates Foundations Effective Teaching Strategy" by Thomas Kane in *Education Next*, October 15, 2018, https://bit.ly/2OXocV7

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7. Successfully Launching Collaborative Group Work

"Truly collaborative group work is complex and messy," says Jeff Knutson (Common Sense Education) in this article in *Edutopia*. There's always the possibility of some students doing all the work, some freeloading, some feeling left out, and nobody having real ownership of a mediocre product. But group work can also be highly effective: "We know that students don't learn facts in a vacuum;" says Knutson; "social learning helps them build a more meaningful understanding of the world." He suggests guidelines for deciding when to go that route:

• *Ask whether an assignment actually needs to involve group work*. What exactly are the learning outcomes? Can the work be divided into meaningful, equitable components?

• *Break down and scaffold the assignment up front*. Few students are up to the task of dividing up an academic task and delegating responsibilities. Roles and responsibilities need to be crystal clear, getting students working independently and together.

• *Give students a framework to understand their roles*. In many groups, there are roles like timekeeper, note-taker, summarizer. Knutson suggests a different division of labor: with each task, students do something individually, then with another group member.

• *Have students use visual brainstorming tools*. He suggests Mural https://mural.co, MindMeister https://www.mindmeister.com, and Stormboard https://stormboard.com.

"Setting Up Effective Group Work" by Jeff Knutson in *Edutopia*, January 11, 2018, https://www.edutopia.org/article/setting-effective-group-work

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8. Thought-Provoking Questions for Colleagues

In this *Leadership Freak* article, Dan Rockwell says the right questions make people pause and wonder. "Your eyes go to the ceiling," he says. "Your brain lights up." Well-framed questions ignite curiosity, uncover new insights, generate positive energy, and get people thinking about vision and values and looking over the horizon. Some examples:

- And what else?
- What would you like to do about that?
- What do you really want?
- How can I help?
- What questions should I be asking?
- What makes this important to you?
- What will be different if you succeed?
- How will you live your values today?

Rockwell says questions including the words *what, how,* and *who* invite a conversation, whereas questions that begin with *Why…? Wouldn't you…? Are you…* and *Shouldn't you…"* sound accusatory, and questions that can be answered *Yes* or *No* bring closure too soon.

"How to Fuel Energy and Explore Possibility" by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, October 25, 2018, https://leadershipfreak.blog/2018/10/25/how-to-fuel-energy-and-explore-possibility/

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9. Dealing with Toxic Staff Members

In this *Education Week* article, Corey Mitchell reports on veteran administrators' experience with colleagues who undermine and disrupt the school's mission. "On the surface, perhaps some of these troublemakers don't seem like the most horrible things in the world," says Virginia leader Diane Watkins. "But because they slowly erode the morale of your building, they can be."

John Eller (St. Cloud State University) has catalogued some common problem behaviors and tactics:

- Justifying actions based on the way things were done before ("The last principal didn't have a problem with that") – Response: reaffirm that you are a different principal with different expectations.
- Oblivious about how the behavior affects others – Response: provide clear feedback to help the person understand the impact.

- Denying, refuses to acknowledge the problem – Response: directly address the problematic behavior, leaving no room for misinterpretation.
- Blaming others – Response: steer the conversation toward problem-solving.
- Stalling, hoping to last you out – Response: make it clear that you want to solve the problem for the good of the staff and students.
- Making excuses, spending more time justifying and rationalizing than it would take to change the behavior – Response: avoid getting pulled down that rabbit hole, discuss how this response doesn't further your long-range goals.
- Recruiting colleagues, parents, or community members to resist initiatives – Response: clarify with colleagues what you want to change and why, and while input is appreciated, you are the captain of the ship.
- Passive-aggressive undermining by not completing assignments or giving 100 percent – Response: make sure people assigned to a task have appropriate training and a clear idea of what is intended.

A common mistake, says former principal Todd Whitaker, is ignoring troubling behaviors in hopes that they, or the perpetrators, will go away. Another mistake is addressing the whole staff rather than talking with the malefactor face to face. "Dealing with negative people is never easy," he says. "It's never fun. But if you don't do it, nothing about your job is fun."

Four additional pieces of advice from Mitchell's interviewees: address problems early rather than letting them fester; use a light touch at first, increasing the odds of a no-big-deal change in behavior; during difficult conversations, make it about the behavior, not the person; and listen to the other person's perspective because there may be something you're missing.

A proactive strategy, veteran principals told Mitchell, is to be in classrooms every day, complimenting effective practices and building relationships and rapport with colleagues. That way, when difficult conversations become necessary, they've been preceded by others that are more positive.

"Unfortunately," says Watkins, "sometimes the most difficult person in the building is the principal." Whitaker adds that an insensitive and ineffective leader can corrupt an entire school. One way to tune in on one's own shortcomings is conducting a regular staff survey and looking objectively at critical feedback.

"How Principals Can Banish Toxic Adult Behavior from Their Schools" by Corey Mitchell in *Education Week*, October 17, 2018 (Vol. 38, #9, p. 18-20),
https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/10/17/how-principals-can-banish-toxic-adult-behavior.html
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10. Award-Winning Young Adult Books

In this article in *English Journal*, Bryan Gillis (Kennesaw State University) names six young-adult books that came out on top in the annual Honors List selection process. Gillis believes they all belong in ELA classrooms:

• *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi, grades 9 and up – A sixteen-year-old girl and her mother leave Haiti to start a new life in the U.S., but the girl is separated from her mother on arrival and deals with a multitude of challenges in Detroit.

• *Far from the Tree* by Robin Benway, grade 8 and up – A sixteen-year-old girl who recently had a child and placed it for adoption seeks her birth mother.

• *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, grade 8 and up – A sixteen-year old African-American girl navigates the two worlds of her poor neighborhood and the predominantly white suburban high school she attends.

• *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sánchez, grade 8 and up – A fifteen-year-old girl, the daughter of undocumented Mexican immigrants, deals with a series of challenges in a tough Chicago neighborhood.

• *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds, grade 8 and up – This free-verse narrative tells the story of a teen boy who has to decide whether to avenge the murder of his brother and join in the cycle of violence in his gang-infested neighborhood.

•*We Are Okay* by Nina LaCour, grade 9 and up – A young woman in college in upstate New York finds she is unable to distance herself from her upbringing in California and memories of her deceased grandfather.

"The Honors List of 2017 Prize-Winning Young Adult Books: Building Relationships and Developing Identity" by Bryan Gillis in *English Journal*, September 2018 (Vol. 108, #1, p. 73-79), https://bit.ly/2DbRzxK

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11. Short Item:

The Apollo 11 moon voyage – This graphic depiction with commentary https://www.vox.com/videos/2018/10/23/18013602/moon-landing-apollo-11-saturn-earth-annotated vividly captures the historic moon shot of 1969.

"Apollo 11's Journey to the Moon, Annotated" by Coleman Lowndes in *Vox*, October 23, 2018

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
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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 (formerly Reading 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