

Marshall Memo 1060

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

November 4, 2024

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Quotes of the Week

“Our library shelves, our displays, our books are always talking. What message are they sending about who is included and welcome in our space and who isn’t?”

Julie Stivers (quoted in item #5)

“AI can make some things faster, tidier, and more efficient, but it can’t replace a human. Using AI well doesn’t mean pressing a button that writes an essay; it means we’re engaging back and forth with a tool that’s augmenting our goals... In a similar way, when you’re cooking a meal, you put thought into picking your ingredients, considering how finely to chop them, or what temperature to cook them. You can have a fancy kitchen gadget that will help along the way, but for people who cook really well, that gadget is stitched into the larger activity of the cooking process... So being a user means knowing *when* and *when not* to use a tool, whether it’s to cook or to write.”

Victor Lee, quoted in [“AI as a ‘Paintbrush of Possibility’](#)” by Jessica Comola in *Educational Leadership*, November 2024 (Vol. 82, #3, pp. 16-20)

“News accounts routinely confuse people’s attitudes toward colleges as political and cultural institutions with their desire to attend college or to send their children there.”

Kevin Carey and Sophie Nguyen (see item #2)

“When we finally get our collective heads around the latest apps, internet slang, dangerous scams, or destructive trends, the kids pivot on us! They move to new platforms, come up with new ways to bend the rules we’ve set for them, and do weird or creative things we would have never anticipated needing to talk with them about. Our attempts at educating and guiding these digital citizens are often reactive, not proactive, and can feel absolutely exhausting.”

Kristen Mattson in [“It’s Time to Get Serious About Digital Citizenship Education”](#) in *Educational Leadership*, November 2024 (Vol. 82, #3, pp. 30-35)

1. Dealing with the Hobgoblin of Perfectionism

In this article in *Psychology Today*, four authors offer their advice on avoiding the demonstrable downsides of perfectionism:

“Excellent is not the same as perfect, and knowing the difference could save your mental health,” says writer/poet Arash Emamzadeh. Perfectionism is “working toward and becoming preoccupied with idealized goals that are unrealistically ambitious,” and can include being harshly self-critical and constantly doubting oneself. Striving for excellence, on the other hand – reaching for high yet attainable standards in a determined yet flexible way – is a healthy space to be in, linked to academic improvement, future achievement, and higher life satisfaction. “Perfect may be the enemy of good,” says Emamzadeh, “but excellence may be the cure for perfect.”

Perfectionism can be directed inward, says Gregory Chasson (University of Chicago), applying very high standards and inflexible thinking toward oneself. Or it can be directed outward, judging others against rigid moral standards. Perfectionists may check their work a dozen times (*Is it correct?*) or incessantly seek approval from others (*Is this okay? Are you sure?*). “This self-flagellation can be hard for others to witness,” says Chasson, “frustrating and disappointing the people around the perfectionist.” He suggests imagining that we have a “social bank account” with everyone in our lives, and they have one for us. “Funds” are withdrawn or deposited with each interaction. “Before roping in others with our perfectionism,” he says, “it can be helpful to determine whether there may be a social expense.”

Executive coach Anna Katharina Schaffner says that “perfectionist striving” – the desire to deliver excellent work and perform to high standards – is associated with positive traits like conscientiousness and problem-solving skills. “Perfectionist concerns,” on the other hand – extreme worry about making mistakes or being negatively evaluated by others – are associated with less-positive traits like neuroticism, low tolerance for ambiguity, inefficient workaholism, and health problems. “If only we could all just strive for excellence without judging ourselves too harshly when we fall short,” says Schaffner, “we could become ‘good enough perfectionists,’ always trying our best but remaining gentle and forgiving with our fragile selves.”

Fear of making mistakes, says Susan Krauss Whitbourne (University of Massachusetts/Amherst) is at the heart of perfectionism. One way to address the problems this causes is to be helped to see that inevitable mess-ups aren’t as disastrous as imagined. Psychologists performed an experiment where undergraduates identified as perfectionists were put in

challenging situations where they made mistakes and were shown that it wasn't a big deal. Quite quickly, the students underwent some "cognitive restructuring" and dialed back on their unhealthy perfectionist self-demands. "When the desire to perform well has the unintended effect of lowering your ability to get things done," concludes Whitbourne, "as well as your sense of self-worth, some mistake-making may be all you need."

"The Perfectionism Trap" by Arash Emamzadeh, Gregory Chasson, Anna Katharina Schaffner, and Susan Krauss Whitbourne in *Psychology Today*, November/December 2024 (Vol. 57. #6, pp. 26-31)

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2. Have Americans Turned Against Higher Education?

"Americans are losing faith in the value of college," say Kevin Carey and Sophie Nguyen (New America) in this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article. "Or so we are told." It's certainly true many colleges are dealing with declining enrollment, and there's intense political criticism, especially of elite colleges. But the journalistic as-we-all-know narrative is misleading. "News accounts routinely confuse people's attitudes toward colleges as political and cultural institutions," say Carey and Nguyen, "with their desire to attend college or to send their children there." Here's the real story:

- Colleges are institutions, and people have lost confidence in institutions of all kinds. But in a recent Gallup poll, higher education ranked fourth out of 17, just behind small businesses, the military, and the police (Congress was dead last at 8 percent approval).

- Feelings about higher education are increasingly partisan. There's been a demographic shift in those who have attended college, report Carey and Nguyen, heavily favoring Democrats. And since 2016, the percent of Republicans saying colleges and universities have a negative impact on the country has risen to 59 percent, compared with only 18 percent of Democrats.

- College enrollments are declining for reasons unrelated to public enthusiasm for college. Enrollments are indeed dropping, and small, private colleges are going bankrupt at an alarming rate, but both are happening because of larger demographic and economic trends. 2008 was the peak of the millennial wave, with 4.4 million American 17-year-olds, and the college-going rate in 2009 was 70 percent (up from 50 percent in the 1970s and 80s). Both numbers have gone down steadily since then because of a declining birthrate and job-market factors.

- Polling data about college-going are misleading. For example, a *Wall Street Journal* poll found that only 46 percent of parents said they wanted to send their children to college after high school. This means, say Carey and Nguyen, that 54 percent *do* want their children to go to college after high school.

And the poll's findings about what the 46 percent wanted for their children instead of college are revealing: 8 percent said community college, 5 percent the military, 5 percent a combination of academic learning and on-the-job training, 4 percent training to learn a specialized technical skill, 4 percent to take time off to travel and pursue other interests, 4

percent to work a paid job, 2 percent to do volunteer work or serve on a mission, 1 percent for an internship, 1 percent to start a business, <1 percent to work in a family business, and 4 percent other. “When you add up all the answers that lead toward higher education in different ways,” say Carey and Nguyen, “the percentage of parents who want to send their children to college is closer to 90 percent.”

• People still want the government to make college affordable. Across the political spectrum, there’s agreement that college is too expensive and a strong consensus – even stronger among Republicans – that the federal government should be doing more to support college attendance – through Pell Grants, loan forgiveness, income-driven repayment plans, and other programs.

In short, conclude Carey and Nguyen, “there is a difference between expecting more from an institution and abandoning it. Despite their various dissatisfactions, Americans overwhelmingly still want to send their children to some form of education and training after high school, and they strongly believe that the government should spend more money to make that education affordable. People may be less confident in higher education than they used to be, more questioning of its value, and more annoyed by its many faults. But their belief in college as a bedrock public institution, and their desire for their children to become college-educated, remain.”

[“Americans Have Not Turned Against Higher Ed”](#) by Kevin Carey and Sophie Nguyen in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 1, 2024 (Vol. 71, #5, pp. 43-47).

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3. A Synergistic Writing Partnership with Artificial Intelligence

In this *Kappan* article, James Paul Gee (Arizona State University) and Qing Archer Zhang (Changzhou Institute of Technology, China) say that ChatGPT and other large language models (LLMs) provide students with tempting shortcuts for their writing. Students are especially prone to misuse AI if they don’t see why they should do the hard work of learning to write. “The impact of LLMs on people’s writing skills,” say Gee and Zhang, “will depend on our ability to provide them with a personal reason to care about writing and to teach them ways to leverage LLMs and other generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to enhance their cognitive, social, and emotional understanding and creativity beyond what is possible without them.”

Why write? Historically, the shift from a purely oral culture to one that includes writing has had a major impact on human cognition:

- Writing externalizes thought, creating something we can revisit, revise, and build on.
- It makes us more aware of language structure and usage.
- Writing restructures human consciousness and fosters new cognitive capabilities.
- It changes the brain’s neural circuitry, enhancing critical thinking and empathy.

But these effects vary depending on the type of writing, and that’s where schools come in.

“To get anyone to learn anything,” say Gee and Zhang, “especially something like writing that takes a good deal of time and effort to learn well, we must make them feel there is value in the learning... We must understand how different types of writing exist in schools and how they benefit the writer.” They believe there are four types of writing, all crucial to human growth, engaged citizenship, and resilience in a constantly changing world:

- *Expository and argumentative writing* – This type can empower people to think independently and critically, evaluate evidence, understand other points of view, resist manipulation, make persuasive arguments, and arrive at good decisions. The thinking processes involved can help people advocate for their values while respecting other perspectives.

- *Creative writing* – This can be a tool for self-expression, empathy, and personal growth; it can cultivate deep thinking, emotional intelligence, and innovation; and it can help people set aside conventional approaches and dream of new horizons. “Creative writing also can help individuals process life’s challenges,” say the Gee and Zhang, “offering catharsis and emotional clarity and enhancing their resilience and adaptability.”

- *Dialogic and collaborative writing* – When people respond to writing by others or work together on a project, that fosters intellectual growth, social connections, openness to different perspectives, humility, critical thinking, and collective problem-solving.

- *Reflective writing* – This spurs self-awareness, clarifies personal values and priorities, and fosters emotional intelligence, a growth mindset, problem-solving, and personal growth. “Such writing could well be seen as a crucial 21st-century skill,” say Gee and Zhang, “enabling individuals to thrive amid rapid change and stay grounded in their humanity while engaging with media and technologies.”

The great potential of writing for individuals and society, the authors believe, lies in *integrating* these four in a way that seldom happens in schools. When all four are knitted together “into a single, complex system... the interplay between these different modes of writing creates a virtuous cycle of deepening insight and expanding possibilities.” For example, reflective writing can provide rich material for creative writing while pinpointing biases and assumptions for analytical writing and supplying material for a collaborative project.

Here’s where the new age of generative artificial intelligence comes in. The interaction of these distinct types of writing, say Gee and Zhang, provides a “compelling rationale for the value of writing in the age of AI. Rather than being rendered obsolete by AI tools, writing becomes even more essential as a means of developing the higher-order thinking skills and self-awareness needed to thrive in a world increasingly shaped by these technologies.”

Teachers’ biggest worry about AI is that students will get it to do their writing – in other words, plagiarism. The trick, say Gee and Zhang, is for teachers to use AI as a partner and for students to use it first as a tutor and co-teacher and then as a writing buddy and colleague. “To accomplish this,” they say, “we need to set up interactions with the generative AIs and humans so that both parties learn and get smarter (and more ethical) without having their skills and lives diminished.”

This can happen if students “engage in a back-and-forth process of writing, reviewing, and revising,” they say. “The human should proactively lead by providing goals, prompts, direction, and feedback, while the AI should contribute ideas, drafts, and suggestions... The human and AI should each focus on their unique strengths. Humans should bring their embodied lived experiences, their goals and desires, their feelings and emotions, and their social and cultural identities to the partnership. The generative AI will offer its vast background knowledge, rapid idea generation, and deep pattern-recognition skills. By playing to their respective strengths, the human and AI could achieve a synergistic effect.”

Another approach is for classrooms to replicate popular online affinity spaces, such as The Sims, which integrate the four types of writing in areas of personal interest – for example, poetry, fan fiction, photo editing, and animation. Bringing this kind of rich, multimodal, and highly engaging writing into traditional school settings faces challenges, especially with curriculum coverage and standardized assessment, but Gee and Zhang think it has potential.

The key, they believe, is helping students work with artificial intelligence to take the “frozen” language of textbooks and curriculum materials and express it in their own words, in “flexible,” conversational ways. “This type of language is more dynamic,” say the authors, “allowing for personal interpretation, creativity, and the negotiation of meaning. It is used in classroom discussions, collaborative problem-solving, and other interactive contexts... Students need to be able to move between these modes of language to fully grasp and apply knowledge... If students are using flexible language, it is likely that they are treating AI as a partner to enhance their thinking and writing, rather than simply having it do the work.”

This has direct implications for how teachers check on students’ understanding. Traditional quizzes and tests following a linear curriculum sequence have serious shortcomings, say Gee and Zhang. “When education focuses too much on memorizing facts and precise terminology, students may miss out on opportunities to foster deeper understanding and critical-thinking skills.” Better to use a more-flexible approach, allowing for the fact that some students take longer to learn skills and concepts than others, and partnering with AI as a tutor, co-teacher, and partner to guide students and assess mastery in real time. “Instruction can be individualized,” they say, “and based on achievements, not constrained by time or comparisons to others.”

[“Cybersapien Literacy: Integrating AI and Human”](#) by James Paul Gee and Qing Archer Zhang in *Kappan*, November 2024 (Vol. 106, #3, pp. 32-38); Gee can be reached at jpgee@asu.edu, Zhang at qingquin0827@gmail.com.

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4. Writing Assignments That Truly Engage Students

In this *Teachers College Record* article, Laura Tanenbaum and Kristen Gallagher, English instructors at LaGuardia Community College in New York City, say it’s not enough for students to have politically relevant readings, trauma-informed pedagogy, and a culture of caring. None of these well-intentioned efforts will address students’ mental health struggles,

sagging motivation, anxiety, and dropout rates, say Tanenbaum and Gallagher, if the writing assignments they're asked to do are arbitrary, artificial, and academic.

"Assignment design," they believe, "is an important site of student alienation," and the kind of writing assignments students are often given fail to engage them at an intellectual, cultural, or moral level. Artificial intelligence has made things even worse, since ChatGPT and other bots can churn out standard writing assignments for students in seconds.

The challenge for instructors is crafting assignments that foster connection and engagement, and in their classes, Tanenbaum and Gallagher have tried out a number of ways to accomplish it:

- Significant student choice on topics and strategies;
- Placing students in the role of authority over what is being learned;
- Centering assignments on students' lived experience, including learning English and exploring slang and vernacular expression;
- Opportunities to include friends and family as sources, collaborators, and research subjects;
- Interviewing family members and community members using the tools of oral history and storytelling;
- Writing about community murals, works of public art, memorials, and other artifacts;
- Reporting on local events on their campuses and in their neighborhoods;
- Writing about dreams and theories about dreaming based on dream journals;
- Exploring their names and the meaning and origins of names in families and cultures;
- Sharing school writing with family members and writing about involving their kinfolk in their academic work;
- Writing an imitation poem, using students' own language and experiences to follow the contours of a well-known work of poetry, then reading more work by the poet;
- Researching solutions to real-life problems – roommates who won't do dishes, parents who want them to marry someone they don't love, a family member who goes on unhealthy fad diets, friends controlling anger in arguments, a relative who is drinking too much, concerns about maybe having ADHD.

Students' engagement with this last idea, say Tanenbaum and Gallagher, is typical of the investment that often happens with the others: "They write more, the research is often obsessive, they go above and beyond, they exhibit passion and deep concern in class discussion, and their sense of audience is evidently more clear than in typical composition essays."

"We have found," conclude the authors, "that practices of creative writing can push against alienation and make room for playfulness, experimentation, and joy." A colleague who took a similar approach found that "students who had previously been told they were bad writers thrived when given the opportunity to pursue real, open-ended writing tasks by reporting on events and issues in their communities."

["Combating Student Alienation Through Assignment Design"](#) by Laura Tanenbaum and

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5. Tips for a First-Rate School Library Collection

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article and podcast, Jennifer Gonzalez draws on the wisdom of three school librarians – Julia Torres, Cicely Lewis, and Julie Stivers – to suggest ways to help a library serve as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for students and adults. “Our library shelves, our displays, our books are always talking,” says Stivers. “What message are they sending about who is included and welcome in our space and who isn’t?” Their recommendations:

- *Don’t create a ‘multicultural’ section.* This sends an unintended message – and what if only a few students are picking those books? “We’ve got to get to a place in our society,” says Torres, “where seeing somebody whose lived experience is different from your own is natural, expected, anticipated, desired. Get young people accustomed to looking for storylines and characters that would feature the full range of the human experience, not just one human experience or one group’s human experience.”

- *Go beyond trauma.* There need to be books full of strength and joy, including titles like *The Electric Slide and Kai, I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, and *Children of Blood and Bone*. “Your collection needs to be diverse,” says Lewis, “and not just racially diverse but delving into other areas and caveats that people really don’t talk about and bringing those to the forefront.”

- *Remember manga.* “When you think about who is standing at your manga shelves,” says Stivers, “it is students that are inhabiting more than one beautiful, marginalized community” – including students of color and those who are gay and neurodivergent. “Of course, manga is from Japan,” she continues, “so it is another experience, another country, another language, even though it’s localized into English for us to read it. But just because of what I’m talking about, of who is interested in manga so much, why wouldn’t we flood our libraries with it?”

- *Resources* – Torres, Lewis, and Stivers suggest online tools to audit and create more-inclusive library collections:

- [Booksource Classroom](#)’s Diversity Audit identifies gaps in classroom and school collections.
- The [Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children’s Books](#) has helpful guidelines.
- The [Penguin Random House High School Collection](#) includes thematically grouped texts and lesson plans.
- [Diverse Book Finder](#) has several tools to evaluate and build strong collections.
- [DonorsChoose](#) helps educators get grants to supplement school funds.
- [The Laura Bush Foundation](#) accepts applications from early October through early December each year.

• *Book recommendations* – Torres, Lewis, and Stivers suggest books they believe will be especially valuable additions, if they’re not already on the shelves (click the article link below for a brief synopsis of each):

- *The Door of No Return* by Kwame Alexander
- *Black Star* by Kwame Alexander
- *We Deserve Monuments* by Jas Hammonds
- *Thirsty* by Jas Hammonds
- *Messy Roots: A Graphic Memoir of a Wuhanese American* by Laura Gao
- *Here the Whole Time* by Vitor Martins
- *Darius the Great Is Not Okay* by Adib Khorram
- *Monstrous: A Transracial Adoption Story* by Sarah Myer
- *Queer Ducks* by Eliot Schrefer

And two books for adults:

- *We Want to Do More Than Survive* by Bettina Love
- *Razorblade Tears: A Novel* by S.A. Cosby

[“Creating a More Inclusive Library”](#) by Jennifer Gonzalez, Julia Torres, Cicely Lewis, and Julie Stivers “in *Cult of Pedagogy*, October 27, 2024; Gonzalez can be reached at gonzjenn@cultofpedagogy.com.

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6. Being Proactive with Online Student Drama

(Originally titled “Helping Students Navigate Digital Drama”)

In this *Educational Leadership* article, counselor/author/speaker Michael Creekmore, Jr. has these pointers for educators dealing with student-to-student conflict on social media:

• *Teach through real stories.* “No matter how old students are, they love a good story,” says Creekmore. “When you talk to students about sticky situations you’ve experienced, it conveys understanding and normalizes their feelings” – true tales about misunderstandings, friendships in jeopardy, and social angst.

• *Include digital drama lessons in counseling sessions and classrooms.* Schooling students on the etiquette of social media should be handled separately from lessons on Internet predators and scams, says Creekmore. As an elementary school counselor, he conducts short, preventive lessons on the real-life consequences of online teasing and meanness. He includes pointers on being respectful online, deescalating tense situations, asking help from trusted adults, and taking intentional breaks from screens. For classroom teachers, he suggests the free digital citizenship lessons from [Common Sense Education](#).

• *Teach students how to deescalate.* Students need guidance on active listening, carefully reading online material, not making assumptions, nonverbal communication, anger management, and knowing how to walk away.

• *Increase your vocabulary.* Keeping up with the shifting terminology of the digital age is “the PD you never knew you needed,” says Creekmore. A few samples:

- Bussin – excellent

- Call cap – accuse a person of lying
- Delulu – unrealistic beliefs
- Lock in – getting focused on a specific person, situation, or task
- Ohio – very weird, random, cringey
- Opp – an opponent, perceived enemy
- Rizz – having charisma (also a verb – trying to flirt with or charm someone)
- Roasting – name-calling, making fun of someone
- Sigma – a successful, independent, wildly popular person
- Skibidi – something really “bad” or really “cool” – context is key
- Subs – a social media item that indirectly addresses a person or situation

[“Helping Students Navigate Digital Drama”](#) by Michael Creekmore, Jr. in *Educational Leadership*, November 2024 (Vol. 82, #3, pp. 36-41)

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7. Becoming an Edtech Minimalist

(Originally titled “4 Questions to Ask Before Integrating a New App”)

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, teacher/author Paul Emerich France says that when it comes to choosing classroom technology, it’s important that you have a clear purpose, balance analog and digital learning experiences, and scaffold learning without creating more barriers or making students dependent on the app. France suggests these questions:

- *Does the tech tool make your life simpler?* The ideal app – Seesaw is an example – can be used across multiple subject areas, makes learning accessible to more students, and increases the ways they can demonstrate their learning.

- *Does the tool maximize individual power and potential?* Voice-to-text is great for students with significant disabilities, but it’s an unnecessary crutch for students who can write or type on their own.

- *Does the tool gamify learning experiences?* France is not a fan of Kahoot and other apps that get students racing each other for correct answers. Apps should maximize retrieval practice without time pressure and create novel learning opportunities.

- *Does the tool preserve or enhance human connection?* Students should turn to each other more often than they turn to their devices. That’s more likely if kids are working on collaborative projects where technology is a means to the end.

[“4 Questions to Ask Before Integrating a New App”](#) by Paul Emerich France in *Educational Leadership*, November 2024 (Vol. 82, #3, pp. 14-15)

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8. Short Items:

a. Virtual Visits to U.S. National Parks – This *Edutopia* article by Karisa Schwanekamp describes a virtual field trip to the National Mall in Washington, D.C.,

complete with a chat with a Park Ranger. Here's [the site](#) for virtual field trips to all National Parks.

[“Using Virtual Visits to Explore Our National Parks”](#) by Karisa Schwanekamp in *Edutopia*, October 25, 2024

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b. Classroom Resources for AI – CRAFT – Classroom-Ready Resources About AI for Teaching – from the Stanford Graduate School of Education provides resources for teachers seeking effective uses of artificial intelligence.

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c. What to Ask School Board Candidates – In this *Education Gadfly* article, Michael Petrilli suggests questions to pose to people running for school boards.

[“20 Questions for School Board Candidates”](#) by Michael Petrilli in *Education Gadfly*, October 31, 2024

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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 54 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

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

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed Magazine
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
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Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
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Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education