Marshall Memo 976

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
March 6, 2023

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Quotes of the Week

"School-based mentors can be critical for students' success. Yet not every student who needs a mentor has one, and not every educator knows how to be a mentor."

Madeline Will in "Every Student Needs a Mentor. How Schools Can Make That Happen" in *Education Week*, March 1, 2023 (Vol. 42, #24, pp. 2-6)

"Pretty is not the rent you pay to exist in the world as a woman."

Erin McKean

"Leaders must stop waiting for buy-in and giving resisters veto power over essential changes that will have lifetime impacts on students."

Douglas Reeves and Robert Eaker (see item #3)

"Teachers who simply give students a word list and test on Friday aren't teaching; they are assigning spelling."

Richard Gentry (quoted in item #2)

"In a traditional classroom, we show the students how to do it, then we do one together, then they practice it on their own – the classic *I do, we do, you do* – which promotes, whether you want it or not, a form of behavior called mimicking… In order to get students to think rather than mimic, we have to remove the *I do*."

Peter Liljedahl (see item #1)

1. A Strikingly Different Way of Teaching Math (and Other Subjects)

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, Jennifer Gonzalez interviews Peter Liljedahl (Simon Fraser University, Canada) on his "Thinking Classroom" model. Originally designed for mathematics instruction, it can be used in science, social studies, and language arts with modifications. Here are the essential components:

• *Problems before instruction* – The class begins with students getting a thinking task to work on in small groups. "In a traditional classroom," says Liljedahl, "we show the students how to do it, then we do one together, then they practice it on their own – the classic *I do, we do, you do* – which promotes, whether you want it or not, a form of behavior called mimicking… In order to get students to think rather than mimic, we have to remove the *I do*."

• *Increasingly challenging tasks* – When teachers first launch this model, students get fun, non-academic tasks to help develop a "culture of thinking." Then teachers introduce a carefully sequenced series of curriculum tasks that expose students to key content, one step at a time, becoming more and more challenging.

• *Vertical work* – Groups of three students work standing up. Why this unusual format? "When it's vertical," says Liljedahl, "they can see each other's work, which promotes knowledge mobility and gives greater access to more ideas. When it's vertical, I can see everything. I don't need to wait for that quiz next Friday to see if the students understood it. I can see right now, and then I can intervene right now." Standing up also seems to make students feel less anonymous and more engaged in the classroom.

• *Non-permanent work surfaces* – Students record their thinking on erasable whiteboards. This supports experimentation and creative thinking and makes unsuccessful attempts and mistakes acceptable. "If we compared a group working on a whiteboard versus a group working on flip-chart paper," says Liljedahl, "the group working on the whiteboards, they'll start within 20 seconds. They'll start making notations on the board. They'll try anything and everything because they feel like they can just erase it if it's wrong." Students working on flip-chart paper typically don't get started for three minutes, avoid taking risks, and do less high-level thinking.

• *Explicitly random groups* – When students formed their own groups, or when teachers grouped students strategically, says Liljedahl, "we found that 80 percent of students entered these groups with the mindset that, within this group, their job is not to think." But when teachers made it clear that groups were being formed randomly, within a few weeks, 100 percent of students were thinking and contributing. "In addition," Liljedahl continues, "the use

of frequent and visibly random groupings was shown to break down social barriers within the room, increase knowledge mobility, reduce stress, and increase enthusiasm for mathematics."

• *One marker* – Students have to pass the writing implement from person to person, which means they have to collaborate rather than engage in "parallel play." The teacher circulates as students work, giving hints and suggesting extensions when necessary.

• *Consolidation* – After students have worked through their assigned tasks, they transition to activities that reinforce each student's learning. First they do a gallery walk looking at each group's work, with the teacher pointing out key elements. Next students take notes, writing down their insights in a more-formal and structured way. Finally they do a self-assessment to check on their grasp of the concept or skill.

"A Thinking Classroom: An Interview with Peter Liljedahl" by Jennifer Gonzalez in *Cult of Pedagogy*, March 5, 2023; for more detail, see Liljedahl's book, *Building Thinking Classrooms in Mathematics* (2020).

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2. Spelling Instruction That Sticks

In this *Edutopia* article, Shawna Kay Williams-Pinnock (Micro University College, Jamaica) says that as a young student, she dreaded Friday spelling tests and did poorly on them. But when she became a teacher, she continued the practice of testing students on how well they memorized lists of unrelated words – most of which were promptly forgotten. Soon enough, Williams-Pinnock realized this was an ineffective practice. She was particularly struck by a statement by Richard Gentry: "Teachers who simply give students a word list and test on Friday aren't teaching; they are assigning spelling."

Drawing on Gentry's and other researchers' work, Williams-Pinnock advocates for a different approach:

• *Teach related words*. The lists students learn should be connected – for example, following a spelling pattern or principle, diphthongs and digraphs, or words students need for their writing.

• *Contextualize word-study activities*. These related words should be put to work in classroom discussions, readalouds, and students' sentences, stories, and poems. This gets students in the habit of paying close attention to the spelling of words they encounter in their reading. "Texts with catchy rhyming patterns are especially useful for young learners," says Williams-Pinnock.

• *Diagnose and differentiate*. Low-stakes pretests, looking over students' shoulders as they write, and noticing students' spelling challenges can inform whole-class mini-lessons, small-group work, individual instruction, and practice sessions.

• *Include student choice*. Students should be asked to share words they wish they knew how to spell and those connected to their personal and social interests. "Just be sure," cautions Williams-Pinnock, "to balance what students *want* to know and *need* to know."

• *Capitalize on the language experience approach*. The teacher transcribes stories narrated by students and then reads them aloud, drawing attention to new or previously taught

spelling patterns. "Students can better connect with the words," says Williams-Pinnock, "since they are part of their oral language and convey their lived, vicarious, or imagined experiences."

• *Use real-world errors*. Examples of misspellings in signs, advertisements, and newspaper stories are excellent discussion starters, making clear that correct spelling is not just an academic exercise.

• *Get students proofreading*. The teacher can generate passages with intentional misspellings (for example, spelling words the way they sound) and challenge students to spot them.

• *Assign creative writing*. Students might be asked to write rhyming poems, songs, and other short creative pieces featuring common spelling patterns. "This type of activity," says Williams-Pinnock, "is more meaningful and engaging than sentence-formation exercises and isolated rewrites of misspelled words."

• *Assign word-search puzzles*. Students enjoy these, and puzzles can be customized using TheWordSearch.com to include a spelling pattern the class is studying (in this case, *ou* words).

• *Get students moving*. Physical activities increase engagement, concentration, and retention – for example, hopscotch, jump rope, hula hoops, and other games adapted to challenge students to learn certain words and patterns.

• *Adapt game shows*. *Wheel of Fortune* has great potential, challenging student teams to supply the letters needed to complete a set of related words. *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* also has potential, with students getting clues, guessing the word, and spelling it correctly.

"11 Ways to Boost Elementary Students' Spelling Skills" by Shawna Kay Williams-Pinnock in *Edutopia*, February 22, 2023

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3. Three Ways to Accelerate School Improvement

(Originally titled "Getting More Urgent About Change Leadership")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Douglas Reeves (Creative Leadership Solutions) and Robert Eaker (Middle Tennessee State University) recommend three changes to the traditional school improvement process:

• *Shift from five-year to 100-day plans*. In a single semester, say Reeves and Eaker, there can be dramatic improvements in student engagement, attendance, and pass rates. Especially in the wake of the pandemic, school leaders need to make bold plans and tell stakeholders, "This is what we will accomplish in the next 100 days." An example: a high-poverty California district reduced high-school students' course failure rates from 50 percent to 10 percent or less by two simple changes: shifting from averaging grades to measuring standards attainment, and having students do low-stakes homework assignments in class.

• *Don't wait for buy-in*. The idea that faculty consensus is required to implement change is based on the idea that belief must precede behavior. The latest psychological evidence, say Reeves and Eaker, is that with a well-thought-out initiative, "behavior precedes belief" – in other words, evidence of successful implementation will overcome initial

resistance and create faculty support. "Leaders must stop waiting for buy-in and giving resisters veto power over essential changes that will have lifetime impacts on students," say the authors. "Principals don't ask for buy-in on cafeteria hygiene or bus safety, because our students' lives depend on our commitment to safe food and transportation. Student success in school is *also* a health and safety issue."

• *Less is more*. "Initiative fatigue, combined with poorly communicated changes, insufficient support, and unnecessary complexity, undermines even the most logically sound change efforts," say Reeves and Eaker. School leaders need to focus on a manageable number of efforts, monitor results, make mid-course corrections if needed, and build momentum for lasting improvements in teaching and learning.

"Getting More Urgent About Change Leadership" by Douglas Reeves and Robert Eaker in *Educational Leadership*, March 2023 (Vol. 80, #6, pp. 20-24); the authors can be reached at douglas.reeves@creativeleadership.net and robert.eaker@mtsu.edu.

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4. Experiential Education 2.0

In this article in *Independent School*, Lauren Kelley (Cascades Academy) and Shoshanna Sumka (ISEEN) describe the evolution of experiential education over the last decade. It has always aimed to engage students in real-world experiences, personal relevance, community involvement, interdisciplinary connections, experimentation, reflection, and analysis, resulting in deep learning and growth. "Experiential education isn't – and has never been – about getting soft and fluffy or divorced from core content or subject disciplines," say Kelley and Sumka. "It delivers unique academic depth."

But recently, they say, there have been some needed changes: "Today, educators must assess, evaluate, and reckon with what has been out of sight and unconsidered in our practices and programs." Several key areas:

• *Diversity* – "Schools have been building programs in isolation," say Kelley and Sumka. Experiential education needs to include the school's social-emotional curriculum and its diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

• *Service* – The previous paradigm emphasized students helping the less fortunate. "In recent years," say Kelley and Sumka, "there's been a shift away from saviorism-inspired community service programs to justice-focused community engagement initiatives. Such programs seek to build partnerships that are bilateral in design and mutually beneficial with objectives based on understanding rather than hours served."

• *Outdoor education* – Traditional backpacking expeditions are being enhanced with an emphasis on climate change, sustainability, access, and knowledge of Native American history. "What emerges," say the authors, "is a far more nuanced and complex experience of the natural world, both its past and its future."

• *International travel* – A decade ago, trips to developing countries "highlighted images of students in quaint villages hugging orphans, painting school walls, and unknowingly appropriating sacred cultural traditions," say Kelley and Sumka. "Today, schools and

organizations that are leading the global education movement understand that trips should be grounded in explicit ethical travel standards and built around clear educational objectives related to intercultural fluency in order to reinforce the competencies of a global citizen."

• *Its place in the curriculum* – The most important shift for experiential education, say Kelley and Sumka, is moving it from an optional add-on to the center of a school's mission and an important component of its graduation requirements. "It's time for our schools to deliver transformational, holistic learning rather than passive consumption of information," they conclude. "Schools must reevaluate the educational objectives of experiential programs to ensure there's a wider and deeper understanding of the skills they want to develop and the understandings they want to inspire."

"The Next Evolution" by Lauren Kelley and Shoshanna Sumka in *Independent School*, Spring 2023 (Vol. 82, #3, pp. 51-54)

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5. Fine-Tuning "Flipped Instruction"

In this *EdSurge* article, Jeffrey Young summarizes a recent study on the efficacy of "flipped" instruction (students watching a video of the instructor's lecture for homework and using class time to engage in discussions and activities). While affirming the basic idea, the study found that in some cases, significant classroom time was devoted to lectures and explanations, resulting in students spending *more* time as passive learners than with traditional teaching.

John Hattie, a co-author of the study, says one possible explanation is that some students don't watch the videos, or watch them at double speed, and arrive in class unprepared to engage in active learning. A key factor in successful flipped lessons is whether instructors have ways to ensure students do their homework, which probably means some kind of beginning-of-class assessment.

The researchers believe the most effective way to use the flipped model can be summarized as *fail, flip, fix, and feed*:

- Students are given a challenging problem on material they haven't studied yet and most of them fail to solve it.
- They're given a video explaining the concept and are motivated to watch it outside of school so they understand the problem.
- The instructor uses class time to fix misunderstandings, with a mix of short lectures and student activities.
- Students are assessed on their understanding and get feedback.

"Does 'Flipped Learning' Work? A New Analysis Dives Into the Research" by Jeffrey Young in *EdSurge*, February 16, 2023

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6. Should Teachers Be Evaluated by Their Peers?

In this article in *Educational Policy*, Timothy Ford (University of Oklahoma) and Alyson Lavigne (Utah State University) say that despite the flexibility introduced by ESSA legislation in 2015, evaluating teachers continues to take an enormous amount of most principals' time. The increased paperwork demands of the Race to the Top era live on in many districts, reducing the time principals spend in classrooms and engage in meaningful discussions with teachers and teacher teams. While some principals cut corners or find ways to work around the system, for many it continues to be oppressive. The total cost of evaluating the nation's 3.1 million teachers is estimated to be about $700 million.

Does all that work – pre-observation conferences, formal classroom visits, post-observation conferences, and writing up summative evaluations – improve teaching and learning? Recent research indicates that it doesn't, say Ford and Lavigne. That may be partly because of the evaluation model being used, which attempts to combine coaching with evaluation in a highly bureaucratic way, and partly because many teachers are evaluated by principals who are not well versed in their subject area. The authors wondered if being coached and evaluated by peers – a model more widely used in other countries – might be more effective. "Does who is doing the evaluation matter?" they asked.

Ford and Lavigne used data from 36,411 secondary-school teachers in eleven countries to address this question. What did they find? Teachers who were supervised, coached, and evaluated by fellow teachers reported significantly higher confidence, motivation, and improvements in classroom practice than those evaluated by principals. This seemed to be because of the lower-stakes nature of fellow teachers' evaluations and, in many cases, peers' greater knowledge of teachers' subject area. Both of these factors also made peers looking at students' assessment results with teachers a less fraught and more productive activity.

In contrast, say the authors, when principals wielded extrinsic motivators like merit pay, promotions, unfavorable assignments, and dismissal as part of the evaluation process, teachers reported much more negative reactions. "These findings," say the authors, "suggest that policies and practices in teacher-evaluation systems that prioritize teacher growth and development may be more effective in fostering teachers' motivation and practice than those models that prioritize holding teachers accountable using high stakes." Ford and Lavigne acknowledge that the difficult work of dismissing ineffective teachers must continue to be done by principals, while noting that the process can have a negative effect on a school's professional climate.

"Our results suggest," conclude the authors, "at the very least, that different teacher evaluation and supervision activities might be led by different individuals within the school… While administrators bring important schoolwide perspectives and knowledge to understanding global aspects of instructional practice and student survey data, teachers and mentors may be able to supplement this expertise in content-based ways that support teacher growth and development, and ultimately student learning." And it might take some of the burden of teacher evaluation off principals' shoulders.

[While there are clear benefits to involving fellow teachers in giving feedback on classroom observations and looking together at evidence of students learning, Ford and Lavigne acknowledge there are significant challenges to scheduling time for peers to do this work and securing funding to make it possible. A change that would provide more-immediate benefits to beleaguered principals would be rethinking the traditional teacher-evaluation model: shifting from infrequent, full-lesson, announced teacher observations with lengthy documentation to frequent, short, unannounced visits, each followed by face-to-face coaching conversations, culminating in summative rubric scoring at the end of the school year with teacher input. This would be an ideal complement to a peer coaching-and-evaluation model. K.M.]

"Does It Matter Who Evaluates Teachers? Principal Versus Teacher-Led Evaluation and Teacher Motivation" by Timothy Ford and Alyson Lavigne in *Educational Policy*, February 9, 2023; the authors can be reached at tgford@ou.edu and alyson.lavigne@usu.edu.

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7. "Stay Interviews" – A Proactive Strategy on Teacher Attrition

In this article in *The Learning Professional*, consultant/coach Kathy Perret says exit interviews give leaders insights on why people are leaving their jobs, leading to improved working conditions. But "stay interviews" are a better idea, she says: asking staff members how they are feeling about their jobs and what they need to happily remain in the school. "Such reflective, one-on-one conversations between teachers and school leaders," says Perret, "are critical for nurturing a healthy school culture, and stay interviews can show staff that you are invested in them for the long term."

Perret recommends making the interviews voluntary, choosing questions appropriate to the school, and stressing that the chats are confidential and aimed at making things better for staff and students. Some possible questions:

- What do you look forward to when you come to work each day?
- If you were to consider leaving this position, why would that be?
- Describe your ideal school.

A middle-school principal in Texas was surprised when a number of teachers immediately signed up after she floated the idea of stay interviews. The conversations were "amazing for my soul," she said, providing valuable insights on changes that needed to be made. Teachers said they were grateful for the opportunity to share their perspective.

Perret recommends working with an instructional coach or another member of the leadership team to organize teachers' suggestions (anonymously) by topic, analyzing them looking for trends and *Aha* moments, discussing the findings with the staff, and deciding on a few immediate changes (quick wins) and longer-range initiatives. "After these steps," she says, "leaders and coaches should monitor the changes over time and collect artifacts to share with staff about progress and areas in continuing need of improvement."

"Want to Retain Teachers? Ask Them What They Need" by Kathy Perret in *The Learning Professional*, February 2023 (Vol. 44, #1, pp. 10-11); Perret can be reached at kathyperretconsulting@gmail.com.

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8. Weekends That Are Energizing Because They're Different

"It's time to reclaim our weekends," says Jeffrey Davis in this *Psychology Today* article. A recent survey found that almost two-thirds of Americans are stressing themselves out with Saturday/Sunday work.

But it's not enough to chill out and sleep more. A weekend is most refreshing if it's spent doing something quite different from the workweek. Davis suggests that we ask ourselves three questions and plan accordingly:

• *What is the mental nature of your work?* If it's creative, he says, engage in weekend activities like hiking, sewing, woodworking – activities that light up different parts of the brain. If your work is non-creative, then creative activities like painting, photography, and writing may be best.

• *What is the physical nature of your work?* If it's sedentary, then gardening, running, pickleball, and the like are the most helpful. If the workweek is physically energetic, a quiet, relaxing activity will be most refreshing.

• *What is the social nature of your work?* If it involves a lot of human interaction, he recommends reading, meditation, or a solo walk. If you are isolated at home or in a quiet office during the week, a class, team sport, or a book club may be best.

"Whatever activity you choose," Davis concludes, "experiment with your weekends to learn how you can best show up on Monday morning energized and refreshed. You might find you don't need to work those extra hours after all."

"The Science of Weekend Recovery" by Jeffrey Davis in *Psychology Today*, March/April 2023 (Vol. 56, #2, pp. 24-25)

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9. Ten Reasons for Strong Social Studies Instruction

In this *Solution Tree* article, Elliott Seif follows up on his rationale for strong science instruction (see Memo 974) with the key contributions that social studies can make to a well-rounded education:

- Providing a broad knowledge base for understanding today's complex world;
- Understanding our nation's values, ideals, and principles;
- Analyzing current issues and events and becoming an informed, active citizen;
- Developing and applying key skills like writing, speaking, listening, argumentation, numeracy, research, data analysis, and using evidence;
- Learning how to be a capable, collaborative problem-solver;
- Developing critical and creative thinking skills;
- Joining content with ELA, science, math, and the arts in interdisciplinary units;

- Understanding positive leadership and how difficult issues can be solved;
- Understanding one's own history and culture and that of others around the world;
- Getting practical, everyday information on financial literacy, career options, and voter registration.

"Ten Reasons Why a Strong Social Studies Education Is Critical for Living in Today's and Tomorrow's World" by Elliott Seif in *Solution Tree*, February 21, 2023

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10. Children's Books That Affirm Diverse Cultures and Languages

In this *Language Arts* feature, Aeriale Johnson and Ursula Túa Santiago recommend books that help English learners feel culturally visible and sustain their home languages in the classroom (see the link below for cover images and short descriptions):

- *Singing with Elephants* by Margarita Engle
- *My Name Is Gabriela/Me Llamo Gabriela* by Monica Brown, illustrated by John Parra
- *Looking for a Jumbie* by Tracey Baptiste, illustrated by Amber Ren
- *Keepunumuk: Weeâchuman's Thanksgiving Story* by Danielle Greendeer, Anthony Perry, and Alexis Bunten, illustrated by Garry Meeches, Sr.
- *Hundred Years of Happiness* by Thanhhà Lai, illustrated by Nguyen Quant and Kim Liên
- *Drawn Together* by Mihn Lê, illustrated by Dan Santat
- *Ancestor Approved*, edited by Cynthia Letich Smith
- *Kapaemahu* by Hinaleimoana Wong-Kalu, Dean Hamer, and Joe Willson, illustrated by Daniel Sousa Kokila
- *Laxmi's Mooch* by Shelly Anand, illustrated by Nabi Ali
- *Beauty Woke* by NoNiequa Ramos, illustrated by Paola Escobar
- *Your Mama* by NoNiequa Ramos, illustrated by Jacqueline Alcántara

"'BE YOU!' Using Texts to Promote Children's Visibility and Sustain Their Languages at School" by Aeriale Johnson and Ursula Túa Santiago in *Language Arts*, January 2023 (Vol. 100, #3, pp. 254-259)

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11. Short Item:

Technology Through the Ages – This graphic by Max Roser shows how technology has developed through the millennia.

"A Long-Term Timeline of Technology" by Max Roser in *Our World in Data*, February 22, 2023

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
please e-mail kim.marshall48@gmail.com

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 HTMI version as well.

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education