Marshall Memo 596

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 20, 2015

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"We train, hire, and pay doctors to be cowboys. But it's pit crews people need."
Atul Gawande (see item #1)

"Checklists seem lowly and simplistic, but they help fill in for the gaps in our brains and between our brains. They emphasize group precision in execution."
Atul Gawande (*ibid*.)

"If you e-mail, text, tweet, Facebook, Instagram, or just follow Internet links, you have access to an ever-changing universe of social touchpoints. It's like circulating within an infinite throng, with instant access to people you'd almost never meet in real life. Online life is so delicious because it is socializing with almost no friction… You can control your badinage and click yourself away when boredom lurks."
David Brooks (see item #2)

"Keystone habits start a process that, over time, transforms everything… They help other habits to flourish by creating new structures, and they establish cultures where change becomes contagious."
Charles Duhigg (see item #3)

"Teachers must seek ways to better understand who parents are, what parents want and desire for their children, and what parents can teach them about educating their children. It is also necessary that teachers become a part of the family's support system, and begin to truly trust and believe that parents want their children to succeed in life."
Michele Myers (see item #5)

"Find the balance between being 'pushy' and being a 'pushover.'"
Michele Myers (*ibid*.)

1. Atul Gawande on the Need for Professional Teamwork

In this 2011 *New Yorker* article with direct implications for K-12 schools, Boston surgeon Atul Gawande reflects on the sea change in medical practice over the last two generations. Doctors can no longer be "cowboys," he says – independent entrepreneurs who handle almost everything and hold all the important information in their heads. In the old days, "One needed only an ethic of hard work, a prescription pad, a secretary, and a hospital willing to serve as one's workshop, loaning a bed and nurses for a patient's convalescence, maybe an operating room with a few basic tools. We were craftsmen. We could set the fracture, spin the blood, plate the cultures, administer the antiserum. The nature of knowledge lent itself to prizing autonomy, independence, and self-sufficiency among our highest values, and to designing medicine accordingly."

Now, says Gawande, "medicine's complexity has exceeded our individual capabilities as doctors." Back in 1970 it took 2.5 clinical staff members to care for a patient in a typical hospital; now it takes more than 15. Specialization is the order of the day, and the result is greater sophistication, much higher costs, and, because of ineffective teamwork, lots of problems for patients. Two million patients pick up infections in American hospitals every year. Among coronary-disease patients, 40 percent receive incomplete or inappropriate care, and the same is true of 60 percent of asthma patients. Half of major surgery complications are avoidable with existing knowledge. "It's like no one's in charge – because no one is," says Gawande. "The public's experience is that we have amazing clinicians and technologies but little consistent sense that they come together to provide an actual system of care, from start to finish, for people. We train, hire, and pay doctors to be cowboys. But it's pit crews people need."

The good news is that a few hospitals and health-care systems are much more effective than others – and they're not always the most expensive. The secret sauce of the most effective and most cost-effective practices is that they function like a *system*. "By a system," says Gawande, "I mean that the diverse people actually work together to direct their specialized capabilities toward common goals for patients. They are coordinated by design. They are pit crews. To function this way, however, you must cultivate certain values that are uncommon in practice and not often taught." In fact, the key values are a radical departure from the old cowboy mentality:

• *Data about results* – It's essential to know when you've succeeded and when you've failed. People in the most-effective systems put considerable effort into collecting information,

refining it, and understanding the implications for their work.

• *Solutions to recurring glitches* – Successful practitioners identify recurring problems and implement effective solutions. In aviation, engineering, and medicine, one of the most successful innovations has been the checklist. "Checklists seem lowly and simplistic," says Gawande, "but they help fill in for the gaps in our brains and between our brains. They emphasize group precision in execution."

• *Coordination so the system approaches zero errors* – The challenge is getting colleagues along the entire chain executing at a level that produces very high-quality results. This requires humility (no matter how experienced or smart you are, you'll occasionally fail), standardization (following best practices every time will reduce failures), teamwork (others can save you from failure), and discipline.

"These values are the opposite of autonomy, independence, self-sufficiency," says Gawande. "Many doctors fear the future will end daring, creativity, and the joys of thinking that medicine has had. But nothing says teams cannot be daring or creative or that your work with others will not require hard thinking and wise judgment. Success under conditions of complexity still demands these qualities."

Gawande describes a recent conversation with the superintendent of the suburban Massachusetts schools his children attend. Why are art classes being cut and class sizes going up? he asked. The superintendent replied that the main driver was health insurance costs – a small number of teachers with serious illnesses accounted for the majority of the increases, and the increased costs were pulling scarce resources from classrooms. It turns out that Gawande had operated on one of the district's teachers who had a lymphoma – he was part of the problem!

"This is not inevitable," he says. "I do not believe society should be forced to choose between whether our children get a great education or their teachers get great medical care." But some hard decisions have to be made to create cost-effective health care that gets good results. *Fewer cowboys. More pit crews.*

Gawande recently interviewed an actual cowboy: "He described to me how cowboys do their jobs today, herding thousands of cattle. They have tightly organized teams, with everyone assigned specific positions and communicating with each other constantly. They have protocols and checklists for bad weather, emergencies, the inoculations they must dispense. Even the cowboys, it turns out, function like pit crews now. It may be time for us to join them."

"Cowboys and Pit Crews" by Atul Gawande in *The New Yorker*, May 26, 2011,
http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/cowboys-and-pit-crews

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2. David Brooks on the Differences Between Online and Offline Discourse

In this *New York Times* column, David Brooks says the fast-paced, ever-changing world of the Internet feels like "the greatest cocktail party ever," whereas the slower-paced,

more deliberative offline world is like a convivial book club. Brooks believes that each is associated with a distinct type of intelligence:

• *Fluid intelligence* – "If you e-mail, text, tweet, Facebook, Instagram, or just follow Internet links, you have access to an ever-changing universe of social touchpoints," he says. "It's like circulating within an infinite throng, with instant access to people you'd almost never meet in real life. Online life is so delicious because it is socializing with almost no friction… You can control your badinage and click yourself away when boredom lurks." You feel agile, in control of communication, somewhat vulnerable, yet carefree. You skim ahead to get the gist, quickly evaluate, say clever things, process short bursts of information. "Fluid intelligence is a set of skills that exist in the moment," he says. "It's the ability to perceive situations and navigate to solutions in novel situations, independent of long experience."

• *Crystalline intelligence* – "When you're offline you're not in constant contact with the universe," says Brooks. "There are periods of solitary reading and thinking and then more intentional gatherings to talk and compare." Researchers have found that we read print material differently than we read a screen – in a more linear fashion, less likely to multitask, more focused on how different pieces fit together, the narrative shape, the context, the big ideas. "You have time to see how one thing layers onto another, producing mixed emotions, ironies, and paradoxes," he says. "You have time to lose yourself in another's complex environment." You can convert information into knowledge, search for meaning, draw moral conclusions, and embed learnings in long-term memory and, hopefully, wisdom.

The online, fluid-intelligence world "feels more fun, effortless, and natural than the offline world of reading and discussion," Brooks concludes. "It nurtures agility, but there is clear evidence by now that it encourages a fast mental rhythm that undermines the ability to explore narrative, and place people, ideas, and events in wider contexts… These days that requires an act of rebellion, among friends who assign one another reading and set up times to explore narrative and cultivate crystallized intelligence."

"Building Attention Span" by David Brooks in *The New York Times*, July 10, 2015, http://nyti.ms/1TLTPuq

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3. The Power of "Keystone Habits"

In his book, *The Power of Habit,* Charles Duhigg introduces the idea of the keystone habit – a routine or practice that has a domino effect across an organization or a person's life. Keystone habits "can influence how people work, eat, play, live, spend, and communicate," says Duhigg. "Keystone habits start a process that, over time, transforms everything." Here are some examples:

- Family dinner – Studies have shown that eating together every night has a significant effect on children's homework completion, grades, emotional control, and confidence.

- Regular exercise – Vigorous physical activity even once a week has a ripple effect on better nutrition, cutting down on smoking, working more productively, and being more patient with family members and work colleagues.
- Willpower – As the classic "marshmallow" experiments showed, children who can resist temptation and defer gratification do better in many areas of life, and willpower can be developed.

Duhigg explains how keystone habits work with individuals and organizations:

- They produce small wins and stimulate larger, transformative changes by convincing people that more is possible, converting cumulative successes into routines.
- They encourage change by creating structures that help other people thrive.
- They can create a new organizational culture that embodies new values. This is especially helpful in times of uncertainty.

"Keystone habits say that success doesn't depend on getting every single thing right," says Duhigg, "but instead relies on identifying a few key priorities and fashioning them into powerful levers… The habits that matter most are the ones that, when they start to shift, dislodge and remake other patterns… They help other habits to flourish by creating new structures, and they establish cultures where change becomes contagious."

[Can you think of practices or routines in schools and school districts that might act as powerful keystone habits? K.M.]

The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business by Charles Duhigg (Random House, 2012, paperback 2014)

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4. Leaving Behind Ineffective Lecture-Style Teaching

In this 1993 *College Teaching* article, Alison King lampoons the traditional sage-on-the-stage approach to teaching – which tries to pour information into students' empty brains and produces little lasting learning – and suggests three teaching strategies that are far more effective. The common ingredient, she says, is learners actively integrating new information with their prior knowledge and experience.

• *Pausing to process in pairs or small groups* – After presenting a chunk of new material, the instructor has students spend a few minutes engaging in one of the following:

- Think-pair-share;
- Generating new examples of the concept just presented;
- Developing specific scenarios in which the concept can be applied;
- Creating graphic representations of the relationships among aspects of the new concept – concept maps, flowcharts, tables, or graphs;
- Predicting what might happen in a specific situation;
- Developing rebuttals for arguments presented and testing them on classmates;
- Proposing a metaphor or analogy for the concept;
- Thinking up a real-world scenario involving the concept and posing it to a classmate;
- Developing a critique of the concept;

- Summarizing the idea in pairs and checking each other for accuracy.

After a few minutes working in groups, students are called back together to share ideas and questions.

• *Guided Reciprocal Peer Questioning (GRPQ)* – Groups of 3-4 students use a set of generic questions to generate their own questions on the content being studied, for example:

- What is the main idea of …?
- What if …?
- How does … affect …?
- What is the meaning of …?
- Why is … important?
- What is a new example of …?
- Explain why …
- Explain how …
- How does this relate to what I've learned before?
- What conclusions can I draw about …?
- What is the difference between … and …?
- How are … and … similar?
- How would I use … to …?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of …?
- What is the best … and why?

Using these question stems, each student works individually to write two or three thought-provoking questions on the content, and then students take turns answering each others' questions. King says using GRPQ with students "stimulates their critical thinking and promotes high-level discussion. Because of the reciprocal nature of this procedure, all students actively participate in the discussions. Even those students who are reluctant to participate in class for fear of asking the teacher 'stupid' questions are less hesitant about posing such questions to their peers in a small group."

• *Cooperative learning* – King recommends three ways to orchestrate high-quality group work:

- Jigsaw – Curriculum content is divided up into about six chunks; students are divided into six groups; each group works to become proficient "specialists" in one of the areas; students return to mixed groups and each specialist teaches his or her jigsaw piece to the group; all students should then master the full curriculum picture.
- Constructive controversy – Students work in teams of four, with pairs within each group assigned opposing sides of a controversial issue. Each pair researches its side and then the pairs discuss the issue as a team. Understanding is the goal, not winning the debate. After some discussion, pairs switch sides and argue the opposite side of the issue.
- Co-op Co-op – After an initial discussion of a curriculum unit and why it's important, students work in small teams (guided by the instructor) to choose and investigate a

topic, divide responsibility among group members, and produce a group product to share with the whole class.

The key with all cooperative learning strategies, says King, is careful orchestration of curriculum content by the instructor, group goals, and individual student accountability – that is, each student must take an assessment on his or her own at the end.

"Engaging our students in such active learning experiences helps them to think for themselves," King concludes, "– to move away from the reproduction of knowledge toward the production of knowledge – and helps them become critical thinkers and creative problem solvers so that they can deal effectively with the challenges of the twenty-first century."

"From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side" by Alison King in *College Teaching*, Winter 1993 (Vol. 41, #1, p. 30-35), http://bit.ly/1CLUMyE

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5. Issues with Home-School Partnerships in South Carolina

In this *Peabody Journal of Education* article, Michele Myers (University of South Carolina) explores the relationships between African-American families and educators in three rural school districts – in particular, the "disjunctions" that prevent optimal home-school partnerships. Myers, who is African-American, describes the unique perspective she brings to her study. When she was a teacher and principal, she embraced middle-class criteria for appropriate parental involvement in schools, including volunteering, attending events, helping with homework, being visible on site, and participating in school governance. But she also remembers that her own parents, because of economic limitations and work responsibilities, almost never visited her schools, attended school functions, or volunteered – yet they found other ways to support her learning and entry into better schools and ultimately a university. Here is what she found in 13 months of interviews with parents and educators in South Carolina.

• *Parents' perspective* – Parents put a premium on trusting, respectful relationships. For parents, the two nonnegotiables were mutual respect and educators being nonjudgmental. Parents "wanted teachers to acknowledge the contributions they made in their children's lives," says Myers, "and they felt it was important that parents and teachers honored the opinions of and listened to one another. Mutual respect means that there was reciprocity or a give-and-take. Parents wanted to know that they and their children mattered to the teachers." What upset parents most was when educators made assumptions. One mother described bringing her daughter to the cafeteria a few minutes late one morning and a white administrator told her that breakfast was closed and she should take her daughter down the street for breakfast since she had time on her hands. "I was like, 'I got to go to work,'" said the parent. "You know I am not that parent who just sits home all day. I was like how do you just automatically assume that I don't have somewhere to be also. So I was kind of like, 'Wow!' That kind of threw me for a loop. I mean I come in here every day dressed up."

• *Teachers' perspective* – Educators also wanted to establish trusting, respectful relationships with parents, "working together" and "being of one accord." To them, this meant

three things: (a) mutual respect, (b) reliability as a competent, effective, trustworthy professional, and (c) personal regard – caring about and caring for students, in many cases, treating students as if they were their own offspring. One African-American teacher, remembering what teachers had done for her when she was growing up, said, "I let them know that I care by saying, 'I am doing this, because I want you to get out of kindergarten. I want you to get out of the Jackson community. But the only way for you to get out there is by your education. And I care enough for you to get you out of here.'"

Respect was clearly a common theme for parents and teachers, but each had a different understanding of what it meant. "For parents, respect meant that teachers looked beyond their skin color, accepted them as different, and valued their contributions," says Myers. "For many of the teachers, however, respect meant that parents looked to the teachers for guidance on how best to help the students and for parents to act according to what the teachers instructed them to do." Myers found no instances where teachers capitalized on the resources that families provided or really understood the knowledge parents had about their children or the ways they supported their schooling. "I don't feel like many people know how to help their child," said one white teacher. "Parents that I have had over the years really couldn't help their children much." This deficit view of parents' educational levels and parenting skills produced a paternalistic tone and a power imbalance that parents definitely picked up.

Some teachers took the commendable step of making home visits to get a better understanding of their students' living conditions, but the results were not always positive. "Well, they didn't have a chair to sit on, so they gave me a bucket," said one teacher. "And there were chickens in the living room, and that sort of shocked me. How do people live like this?" In this and other instances, what teachers took away was pity and a desire to "mother" students they believed were unable to learn at high levels. Myers says of this teacher, "She confused the lack of economic resources available to this family with a lack of love and attention shown to this student."

Race and class are strong elements in these beliefs, Myers believes: "In many places, racism is a past and present issue that continues to manifest in overt ways when white teachers feel that black parents do not know how to help their children with homework, equating blackness with being undereducated, and covert ways when teachers believe that black parents are lazy and not invested in their children's education. So if we are going to forge mutually respectful relationships with black families, we have to understand the racial disjuncture that divides us and then transform our practices and beliefs so that we operate democratically." Middle-class black teachers are not immune to these beliefs, says Myers, describing instances where despite good intentions, they were condescending toward lower-income families. One black teacher laughingly described how she accepted a cup from a family she was visiting but wouldn't drink from it.

"Teachers must seek ways to better understand who parents are," says Myers, "what parents want and desire for their children, and what parents can teach them about educating their children. It is also necessary that teachers become a part of the family's support system, and begin to truly trust and believe that parents want their children to succeed in life. It is also

critical that teachers call attention to their biases and dismantle them if they truly desire to build home-school relationships that really work and can be sustained over time." She has these specific recommendations for K-12 educators:

- *Get to know students and families beyond the walls of the school*. The goal is "to learn about the rich resources that exist in homes and then use that knowledge to build curriculum with and for the students they teach," says Myers.
- *Interrogate what you think you know about families*. We all have unexamined biases that may work against those who are different from us, she says. "With this new understanding, teachers can then begin to internalize that difference does not equate to deficit."
- *Employ culturally relevant teaching based on an understanding of children's lives*.

Myers also lists several suggestions for parents as they interact with K-12 educators:

- *Advocate for your child*. Some parents pushed to have their children placed in more-challenging classes, questioned special-education placements, or questioned disciplinary decisions.
- *Become familiar with the inner workings of schools*. This includes knowing who is responsible for making key decisions, what programs and curriculum are offered, and how to follow the proper chain of command.
- *Know your rights*. These include knowing a child's academic standing, how grades are determined, available special education support, curriculum accommodations, homework policies, and more.
- *Find the balance between being "pushy" and being a "pushover."* Some examples: Pushover parent: Accepting placement in special education that's not warranted. Skillful advocate: Questioning a student's placement in a special education program. Pushy parent: Demanding a one-on-one shadow to accompany the child throughout the day when it's not needed or feasible.

"Black Families and Schooling in Rural South Carolina: Families' and Educators' Disjunctive Interpretations of Parental Involvement" by Michele Myers in *Peabody Journal of Education* (Vol. 90, #3, p. 437-458), http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/hpje20/current#.Vaz2GCSyyiU; Myers can be reached at gillensm@mailbox.sc.edu.

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6. A Graphic Organizer to Unpack Characters' Thoughts and Feelings

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Erin McTigue, April Douglass, Katherine Wright, Tracey Hodges, and Amanda Franks (Texas A&M University) say that teachers may be paying too much attention to story plots and not enough to the characters. They suggest a strategy to help elementary students put themselves in the shoes (or paws) of characters and thereby develop understanding of different perspectives and improve comprehension. "Young readers can then use that learning to navigate their current world of peer friendships and classroom conflicts," say McTigue *et al*.

The strategy is the CHAMP (Chart for Multiple Perspectives) graphic organizer to help students put into words the nuances of characters' inner dialogue. In the center of the page is a circle in which a target event is written (for example, The pig with the bricks outsmarted the wolf). On either side of the circle are two thought bubbles in which students write what the central characters are thinking or feeling (The pig is scared; the wolf is hungry and frustrated). Under each thought bubble are lines for students to write a fuller explanation of each character's thoughts or feelings.

Some books are better than others for developing perspective-taking, and McTigue and her colleagues suggest these selection criteria:

- The plot centers around an interpersonal conflict between two characters.
- The characters are well-developed and students can relate to them.
- The text provides multiple clues about the characters' motivation but doesn't explicitly state their feelings.
- The book has good illustrations that support comprehension.
- The story is engaging, addresses an important theme (e.g., acceptance into a group, bullying, fear of trying something new), and is appropriate to the grade level.

The authors suggest the following books:

- *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes – A girl is teased for her unusual name.
- *Hugless Douglas* by David Melling – The illustrations add rich detail to the text.
- *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes – A girl's purse is confiscated by the teacher.
- *Ruby the Copycat* by Peggy Rathmunn – A child mimics a friend to be "cool."
- *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type* by Doreen Cronin – An amusing illustrated story with good interplay between illustrations and text.
- *Leonardo the Terrible Monster* by Mo Willems – Text fonts and sizes match how two characters are feeling.
- *The Big Orange Splot* by Daniel Pinkwater – Psychedelic colors in the illustrations match the emotions in the story.
- *Verdi* by Janell Cannon – Verdi stands up to older snakes when they tease him.
- *Max's Words* by Kate Banks – Max wants to be like his older siblings.
- *Duck & Goose* by Tad Hills – Both animals think a beach ball is an egg.

McTigue and colleagues believe this type of lesson helps students:

- Expand emotional vocabulary – Students need to move beyond *sad, mad,* and *happy* and learn a richer set of words – *annoyed, shocked, surprised, frightened*;
- Use text evidence – Students get better at diving into the text to justify their insights about characters' thoughts and feelings;
- Use picture evidence – Similarly, students learn to "read" the illustrations for clues.

The authors say the CHAMP graphic organizer can also be used for non-fiction texts where opposing arguments and differing motivations are central – for example, Lincoln's deliberations before signing the Emancipation Proclamation.

"Beyond the Story Map: Inferential Comprehension Via Character Perspective" by Erin McTigue, April Douglass, Katherine Wright, Tracey Hodges, and Amanda Franks in *The Reading Teacher*, July/August 2015 (Vol. 69, #1, p. 91-101), http://bit.ly/1GweYPV; McTigue can be reached at emctigue@tamu.edu.

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7. Short Items:

a. Can you explain something using only the most common 1,000 words? – The Up-Goer Five website challenges us to explain an important idea using only the 1,000 most commonly used words in the English language: http://splasho.com/upgoer5/ This might be particularly helpful in special education or ELL classes.

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b. The full article on the underrepresentation of minorities in special education – Marshall Memo 594 summarized a *New York Times* article on this phenomenon. Here is a link to the full article, "Minorities Are Disproportionately Underrepresented in Special Education: Longitudinal Evidence Across Five Disability Conditions" by Paul Morgan, George Farkas, Marianne Hillemeier, Richard Mattison, Steve Maczuga, Hui Li, and Michael Cook in *Educational Researcher*, June/July 2015 (Vol. 44, #5, p. 278-292), http://bit.ly/1Ly1NEo

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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 44 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 64 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).

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- A collection of "classic" articles from all 11 years

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief/Public Education NewsBlast
Better: Evidence-Based Education
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter
District Administration
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
Essential Teacher
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Teacher
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Wharton Leadership Digest