Marshall Memo 605

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 28, 2015

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Quotes of the Week

"Teachers who have seen formerly frustrating students come back to visit as successful adults trust in the whole enterprise of schooling and growing up."
Rick Wormeli (see item #2)

"The kids who need the most love will ask for it in the most unloving ways."
Todd Savage, quoting an old adage (see item #4)

"Any method that provides a simple answer or implies that it makes writing 'easy to learn' is misleading and damaging.
Ruth Culham (see item #6)

"When you care about what you are doing, you care about doing it right."
Karen Griffith in "Now Is the Time" in *ASCA School Counselor*, September/October 2015 (Vol. 53, #1, p. 10-14), www.schoolcounselor.org; Griffith can be reached at kggfarm@gmail.com

"I wish that every teenager had to take a course on how their brain works so that they would understand that they're building their brain by what they do every day."
Frances Jensen in "Secrets of the Teenage Brain" (interviewed by Deborah Perkins-Gough) in *Educational Leadership*, October 2015 (Vol. 72, #2, p. 16-20), http://bit.ly/1O51fcd

"Yogi Berra, Yankee Who Built His Stardom 90 Percent on Skill and Half on Wit, Dies at 90"
Headline of a page 1 *New York Times* obituary by Bruce Weber, September 24, 2015 (see item #7 for some of Berra's bon mots)

1. When Educators Act in Ways That Foster Student Misbehavior

(Originally titled "5 Practices That Provoke Misbehavior")

"Misbehavior is a form of communication," says consultant Eric Toshalis in this article in *Educational Leadership*. "When we feel vulnerable, misunderstood, humiliated, or betrayed, we're inclined to act out. Families do it at the dinner table, educators do it in faculty meetings, and students do it in classrooms."

So when students misbehave, Toshalis urges us to consider the *context*. Remembering his mistakes as a teacher, he says: "[W]e need to admit the possibility that we sometimes create circumstances in our classrooms that provoke student misbehavior. Admitting this doesn't absolve students of responsibility for their actions, nor does it make us bad educators if we make a mistake here or there. Rather, acknowledging that we sometimes inadvertently provoke student misbehavior helps us recognize that we're all part of complex relationships in complicated institutions, both of which don't always function optimally for everyone." He addresses five problematic practices:

• *Highlighting ability differences* – Some common teacher actions draw attention to hierarchies: grouping students based on "ability"; using competition, which inevitably produces losers; not asking higher-order questions of low-achieving students, and never posting their work; cold-calling students to embarrass them and produce compliance; emphasizing scores and class rank versus learning and growth; and praising students for intelligence rather than effort. "All these approaches broadcast to students that some are smart, whereas others are, well, not," says Toshalis. "They compel students to look for ways to avoid situations where they might be labeled 'the dumb one'… Research has shown that when educators reduce or eliminate experiences that highlight ability differences, student misbehavior tends to decrease." He advocates challenging, de-tracked learning environments with lots of differentiated support.

• *Promoting a performance-goal orientation*. Grading homework and classroom assignments attaches high stakes to practice work with which students will naturally have some difficulty. Teachers' well-intentioned goal is to assess progress and motivate students to work hard, but the message is that it's about performance, not learning. This produces anxiety and focuses students on how they compare to classmates and what it takes to get an A. "Because it's the answer that matters, not the learning, they will often ask to be spoon-fed the answer

rather than try to figure something out on their own," says Toshalis. "They may be reticent to collaborate with others because helping a peer reduces one's own chance to be the best. They may ridicule classmates' mistakes because instigating insecurity in others is one way of staying on top." The solution is formative assessments for practice work and proficiency-based grading that fosters a mastery-goal orientation.

• *Establishing vague norms* – BE RESPECTFUL is a common rule/admonition posted on classroom walls. "Unfortunately, that's as ambiguous as it is succinct," says Toshalis. "The ambiguity of an expectation like 'be respectful,' coupled with its inevitable arbitrary enforcement, will often provoke misbehavior in students…" That's because students' definition of "respect" and good behavior may be very different from the teacher's. It's a little like visiting a country where cars drive on the opposite side of the street. Crossing a street and driving become much more demanding, and an admonition to "drive respectfully" will not be very helpful. "Likewise, in our classrooms, we tend to establish norms as though they were self-explanatory," says Toshalis, "and we expect a diverse range of students to adhere to them." Schools need to involve students and families in defining what is meant by respectful, caring, kind, polite, appropriate, and mindful, generate examples and counter-examples, and "frequently revisit and revise whatever behavioral norms you decide on as the year progresses. This invites students into a democratic process that will inspire more expansive ways of taking care of one another. It will also make students want to adhere to the norms rather than subvert them."

• *Letting students choose their seats* – The rationale is empowering students and helping them feel less dominated. "But students experience open seating not as freedom but as a form of abandonment," says Toshalis. "The tiny uptick in self-rule a student might experience when choosing a desk is quickly eclipsed when that student must search for the least dangerous seat amid adversaries, bullies, cliques, and even crushes that are always operating in our classrooms." Open seating opens the floodgates to peer segregation, off-task chatting, and then having to move disruptive students. The "in crowd" loudly advocates for choosing seats, but teachers should see their classroom from the vantage point of the marginalized. *Assign seats!* Toshalis advises, guaranteeing students a place that is always theirs, and then mix things up quarterly to foster heterogeneity and intercultural collaboration.

• *Using tired, old scripts* – "Do as I say, not as I do," "Rules are rules," "Because I said so," and "Well, life is unfair." When we say things like this in response to student pushback, says Toshalis, we're telling students "that their experience of school (or of us) is invalid, that their insights or critiques are unwelcome, and that their resistance is pointless." This, too, provokes misbehavior.

"5 Practices That Provoke Misbehavior" by Eric Toshalis in *Educational Leadership*, October 2015 (Vol. 73, #2, p. 34-40), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/1P2mr1H; Toshalis can be reached at etoshalis@post.harvard.edu.

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2. Emotional Health and Self-Renewal in Classrooms

(Originally titled "The 7 Habits of Highly Affective Teachers")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, author/consultant Rick Wormeli imagines some monologues that might be running through students' minds in an average classroom:

- *This stuff is stupid.*
- *This stuff is awesome.*
- *This stuff is beyond me.*
- *I'm not comfortable with this.*
- *Finally, something I'm good at.*
- *Maybe somebody will notice I can't read.*
- *Let's see her find a mistake in that one – it's perfect!*
- *Does the teacher know I didn't study last night?*

Students are by turns "anxious, overconfident, curious, indifferent, angry, amused, lonely, hopeful, embarrassed, empowered, afraid, excited, diminished," says Wormeli. Their emotions are often out of synch with the teacher's and with the school's expectation of conformity and compliance. Wormeli believes that when teachers ignore these emotional disconnects, they're jeopardizing teaching and learning – and their own mental health.

Wormeli suggests seven habits that teachers can use to foster a healthy emotional climate in their classrooms – and maintain their own sanity and humanity:

• *Find joy in others' success*. Celebrate students' intellectual milestones, says Wormeli. Give students an encouraging smile when they show improvement.

• *Cultivate perspective and reframe*. Don't take certain behaviors personally. Be kind rather than right some of the time. Try to see the big picture. "Teachers who have seen formerly frustrating students come back to visit as successful adults trust in the whole enterprise of schooling and growing up," says Wormeli. "Hall duty between classes isn't such a hardship when we realize it's an opportunity to connect with students outside class."

• *Look beyond stereotypes*. There's a tendency to pigeonhole students: a class clown, a geek, a mean girl, a drama queen. "When we see people as fully developed thinkers, they become more to us than our quick categorization reveals," says Wormeli. Visiting students' homes or watching them play soccer, paint a landscape, perform in a concert, or celebrate a religious milestone, we see a different side of them. "They are not just one more paper to grade. We think of them specifically as we plan our lessons, and we look forward to watching them progress."

• *Candidly discuss pedagogical issues*. Research tells us that certain practices are less than effective, says Wormeli: worksheet packets, lectures without opportunities to process content, oral dictation spelling tests as a measure of spelling, counting homework as 50 percent of a report card grade, percentage grades averaged together. Do we have frank discussions with colleagues about changing such practices? Do we work to persuade parents who push for outmoded practices?

• *Embrace humility*. "If someone critiques our teaching, if feels like they're critiquing us," says Wormeli. "In humility, however, we grow comfortable with the idea that we may be wrong… Let's invite administrators, parents, and students to evaluate us at any time."

• *Value intellect*. Teaching the same material year after year can be deadening. Wormeli suggests mixing things up curriculum-wise; attending an Edcamp; writing for publication; rethinking one's goals; writing a personal grading philosophy statement to make sure grades truly measure student learning.

• *Maintain passion and playfulness*. "Having fun with your subject and your students will give students permission to engage, even invest, in their learning," says Wormeli, "and it will elevate your spirits." Use props in lessons; play the part of different historical or literary characters; be a contestant in a review game; insert funny slides into presentations; make fun of your own errors; use students' names in test questions; get a colleague to burst into the classroom with a random piece of information; put a mystery box in the middle of the classroom with yellow police tape around it and a sign saying, *Warning: Open one week from today, only in the presence of an adult*.

"All these habits together create a feeling of emotional wellness," Wormeli concludes, "but they are habits, not incidents. Like muscles that atrophy in disuse, these habits have to be used frequently to achieve emotional health benefits."

"The 7 Habits of Highly Affective Teachers" by Rick Wormeli in *Educational Leadership*, October 2015 (Vol. 73, #2, p. 10-15), http://bit.ly/1VjnUpp; Wormeli can be reached at rwormeli@cox.net.

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3. Teachers Being Clear About Task, Purpose, and Criteria for Success

In this article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Dan Berrett says that some college students [and K-12 students] run into trouble because academic expectations are not clear. It's as if there are unwritten rules that these students aren't privy to. "As an increasingly broad and diverse cross-section of students enters higher education, knowing those rules matters more than ever," says Berrett. "Without them, students stumble. They might miss the point of a paper, drift during discussions, or feel overwhelmed or aimless."

Transparency with assignments is one key to these students gaining confidence, thriving academically, and feeling they belong. Researchers have zeroed in on three components that the most-effective instructors orchestrate and communicate to students:

- The task – What exactly are students being asked to do?
- The purpose – Why should they do it? What important learning will flow from it?
- The criteria – How will students' work be evaluated?

"As minor and perhaps self-evident as the underlying questions may seem," says Berrett, "it's surprising how often they go unexamined… Spelling them out for students does not mean wholesale changes, like flipping courses. It requires no fancy technology." Clarity of task, purpose, and criteria help students meet higher expectations of rigor and ensure equity of

educational quality. Attending to these factors also pushes instructors to think through their material at a deeper level and give assignments that benefit all students.

Why don't some instructors use these simple steps? Because they "often take for granted the logic and the rhythm of their courses," says Berrett. "Some have forgotten how much they know and care about the material relative to their students… An assignment can become an old standard, reliable but creaky." When an instructor is on autopilot, what the assignment is all about, and what it takes to be successful, may seem *obvious* – but to some students, it's anything but. Some instructors also believe that being this explicit about assignments is hand-holding; students should be able to figure out assignments by themselves. And some instructors think that showing students they care about them at a personal level is more important than being explicit about task, purpose, and criteria.

"Understanding the rules of the game is one of the most difficult parts for historically underrepresented students," says Tara Yosso of the University of Michigan/Ann Arbor. This "navigational capital" needs to be developed, and explicitness, along with good teaching and caring, is how it's done. When instructors explain material clearly, use good examples to explore difficult points, are well prepared, and have a solid command of their subject, students notice and appreciate it – and are more successful academically.

"The Unwritten Rules of College" by Dan Berrett in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 25, 2015 (Vol. LXII, #4, p. A26-A29), e-link for subscribers only

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4. A School Connects with Disconnected Students

In his President's Message in *Communiqué*, Todd Savage of the National Association of School Psychologists quotes the old adage, "The kids who need the most love will ask for it in the most unloving of ways." He then describes a process he and his colleagues employed in their school to get a handle on which students were known by adults in the building and which were not. Once each year, they put up photos of every student in the cafeteria or gymnasium and asked all teachers, administrators, custodians, kitchen staff, bus drivers, support staff, and other adults to put a sticky note next to each student they could identify by name and about whom they knew one or two pieces of personal information. When the process was finished, the staff could immediately see which students didn't have connections and needed immediate outreach. "[W[hile we, as adults in the building, can talk the talk," says Savage, "if we're not walking the walk, students may not take us seriously in our efforts to connect with them. We lead by example, not necessarily by what we say."

"President's Message: Relationships Matter" by Todd Savage in *Communiqué*, October 2015 (Vol. 44, #2, p. 2), www.nasponline.org

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5. SMART Goals in Action

In this article in *ASCA School Counselor*, Carol Kaffenberger (Johns Hopkins University) and Mark Kuranz (ASCA professional development director) suggest ways to work with SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-oriented, and Time-bound). The article is written from a counseling perspective, but their tips apply to any goal-writing process.

• *Review school data*. Look for issues with achievement, attendance, or behavior by demographic categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, SES, or grade level. What issues are creating barriers for students? Do any patterns emerge on bullying, behavior referrals, student self-harm, attendance, achievement, or safety?

• *Connect program goals to the school's data*. Here's an example of how a school goal ripples down to action for students:

- School improvement plan goal: By June 2016, at least 50 percent of seventh-graders on the Math Watch List will score Proficient or above on the state math test.
- Teacher's goal: By June 2016, seventh-graders on the Voyager team with math grades of D or F will improve by one letter grade.
- Counselor's goal: By June 2016, 75 percent of seventh-graders on the Math Watch List will pass the state math test.
- Counseling strategies: Individual and small-group counseling involving goal-setting, motivation strategies, and academic support; parent/teacher conferences; consultation with teachers; mentor programs; and incentives.

• *Identify who will receive interventions*. For example, seventh-graders with more than one D/F grade at the end of the first marking period, or K-3 students with six or more absences in the first month of school, or ninth graders with three or more discipline reports in the first quarter.

• *Set goals for each of the SMART goal acronym categories*: Specific: Focused on one domain and data point, for example, achievement, attendance, or behavior, and one specific group; Measurable: For example, grades, days absent or tardy, PBIS data, report card marks; Attainable: Set a target that is a stretch but still possible, for example, third graders who missed 10 days of school in the first marking period will increase attendance by five days during the last two marking periods; Results-oriented: the goal is written in terms of actual outcomes or measurable changes in perceptions; Time-bound: typically, SMART goals are written to be achieved in one school year.

• *Use the SMART goal statement format*. For example, By June 2016, 90 percent of ninth graders with three or more discipline referrals during the first month of school will decrease referrals to none in the last marking period.

• *Complete an action plan for accomplishing each goal*. Begin by identifying the baseline information and the perception data you will need to measure the effectiveness of the intervention. Then identify students, choose interventions, and launch the intervention.

• *Collect before and after data*. This usually involves surveys, pre-tests, needs assessments, or program evaluations of beliefs, attitudes, and competencies to create the baseline and guide the intervention, then review of post-data to evaluate changes.

• *Analyze the data at the end of the year* (or measurement period). Were the SMART goals achieved? What do the data tell us? What are the implications going forward?

• *Share the results with stakeholders*. Charts and graphs can complement the presentation to make the results vivid and understandable and spark thoughtful discussion.

"10 Tips for SMART Goals" by Carol Kaffenberger and Mark Kuranz in *ASCA School Counselor*, September/October 2015 (Vol. 53, #1, p. 28-31), www.schoolcounselor.org; the authors can be reached at ckaffenb@gmail.com and mkuranz@schoolcounselor.org.

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6. Steps for Improving the Teaching of Writing

Yes, writing is a process, says Ruth Culham in this article in *The Reading Teacher*, "but it is as much a process of gathering, sorting, considering, and reflecting on ideas and information as a process of prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. As such, writing instruction shouldn't be reduced to unrealistic schedules, rigid word counts, and organizational formulas. Instead, it should honor the complexities of thought that each student brings to the table, regardless of his or her skill level, home language, and test scores." Culham bemoans the fact that only 27 percent of U.S. students were proficient in writing on the 2012 NAEP assessment, and only 3 percent of those were advanced. "Dismal," she says. "And deeply disturbing."

The good news, Culham believes, is that Common Core expectations will spur improvement. She says this is a good time for elementary teachers to "have a meeting with our writing teacher selves" about how to strengthen classroom practices. Here are her suggestions:

• *Consider how well your students write and how you know*. The best traits to look at are: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions (scoring guides are at www.culhamwriting.com/LIBRARY/RESOURCES/scoringguides.html). It's a good idea to practice scoring a set of papers and compare results with a colleague, says Culham, trying to be within one scoring point of each other. "Think about how you will reinforce what's going well for each student and how you will nudge him or her forward in areas that are not going as well. Hint: 'Good job' and 'Nice work' won't get the job done."

• *Reflect on what you know about and how comfortable you are teaching writing*. Most of us teach writing the way we were taught, she says – skill-and-drill worksheets, isolated practice activities, and too much emphasis on conventions. From research over the last few decades, we know the way forward: writing process, writing traits, writing modes, and writing workshop. Professional conferences are helpful for getting up to speed, as well as watching colleagues who are using effective practices. And beware of charlatans, she says.

• *Make a decision to stop doing what doesn't work and start doing what does*. That means stop doing worksheets and packets, formulas, fill-in-the-blank activities, senseless sentence starters, pointless prompts – these "don't create strong writers," says Culham. "Any

method that provides a simple answer or implies that it makes writing 'easy to learn' is misleading and damaging. Ditch it. For the sake of young writers everywhere, embrace the idea that thinking and writing are how students learn to write." Create writing folders for students to store 2-4 pieces of their practice work – in other words, students' own drafts become helpful worksheets. When students practice skills on their own work, they internalize the learning. Show students your own writing-in-progress and model the editing process.

• *Zero in on one practice that energizes you and your students*. This might be a topic that some students have been talking about, or a mentor text that shows students how an expert tackles a tricky aspect of writing, or it could be a student-friendly scoring guide with color-coding to mark up drafts and final products.

• *Commit to changing or dumping one practice that you and your students despise*. At the top of this list for many teachers is the business of spending 10 minutes carefully reading and responding to each student's writing and then watching them spend 10 seconds looking at the grade and filing the papers away. "No student can attend to every single thing about writing at once," says Culham. "So, don't provide too much feedback, and do it during the writing process instead of afterward, when you are grading the paper for a final score. Your feedback will be more meaningful and useful, and it will take less time." Students should have a specific target to guide their revision and help editing. When the editing and revising is done, Culham advises giving a grade to the final paper and pointing out one area the student handled well and one to work on. "Done," she says; this is not the time for detailed comments. Because this is an unconventional approach, she advises explaining it carefully to parents.

• *Pick a professional book on writing to read and discuss with colleagues*. "Energy to teach writing can be found between the pages of the best books and through the discussions we have as professional educators," says Culham. The ideas will flow and new ones will emerge.

That's a formidable list of initiatives! Pick one to tackle first, she advises, "and do it with gusto."

"Call a Meeting with Your Writing Teacher Self" by Ruth Culham in *The Reading Teacher*, September/October 2015 (Vol. 69, #2, p. 219-222), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/1QJhv06;

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7. The Wisdom of Yogi Berra

Baseball great Yogi Berra died at age 90 last week. Here are some of his more celebrated "Berraisms":

- Baseball is 90 percent mental. The other half is physical.
- I'd give my right arm to be ambidextrous.
- You wouldn't have won if we had beaten you.
- If the people don't want to come out to the park, nobody's going to stop them.
- It's like déjà vu all over again.
- It's tough to make predictions about the future.
- Always go to other people's funerals; otherwise they will not go to yours.

- You can observe a lot by watching.
- If you come to a fork in the road, take it.
- I didn't say half the things I've said.

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8. Short Items:

a. Assessing the value of social-emotional learning – Teachers College at Columbia University has published a free online analysis of six well-known programs for social-emotional learning: the 4Rs Program, Positive Action, Life Skills Training, Second Step, Responsive Classroom, and Social and Emotional Training. The researchers calculated per-pupil costs (materials, equipment, facilities, and personnel) and downstream results (lifelong earnings, incidence of smoking, teen pregnancy, child abuse, asthma, and criminal behavior). The bottom line: long-term benefits exceed initial costs by an average ratio of 11 to 1. One example: the 4Rs program costs $68,000 for 100 students and produces economic benefits of $832,000. The analysis can be found by Googling "The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning" (with quotes).

"The Economic Value of Social and Emotional Learning" by the Center for Cost-Benefit Analysis at Columbia University Teachers College, spotted in *Educational Leadership's* "Research Alert", October 2015 (Vol. 72, #2, p. 8)

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b. Videos on how the brain works – This series of 10-minute YouTube videos by John and Hank Green introduces teachers and students to historical and current research on how the mind works: www.youtube.com/user/crashcourse (accompanied by ads); spotted in *Educational Leadership* "Research Alert", October 2015 (Vol. 72, #2, p. 9)

"A Crash Course on the Brain" by John and Hank Green, spotted in *Educational Leadership's* "Research Alert", October 2015 (Vol. 72, #2, p. 8)

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c. Suicide prevention curriculum – The free 10-lesson "Schools for Hope" curriculum (geared to fifth grade) aims to counteract the tendency of upper-elementary and middle-school students to lose hope – the prime predictor of suicidal ideation and attempts in adolescence. www.schoolsforhope.org

"Schools for Hope" by the International Foundation for Research and Education on Depression (iFRED), www.ifred.org; spotted in *Educational Leadership's* "Research Alert", October 2015 (Vol. 72, #2, p. 9)

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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).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are $50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

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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
Literacy Today
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
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 Magazine
Wharton Leadership Digest