Marshall Memo 993

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 3, 2023

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Doing the right thing is never the wrong thing."

"Be curious, not judgmental."

"Living in the moment is a gift; that's why they call it the present."

"As the man once said, the harder you work, the luckier you get."

"You say impossible, all I hear is, 'I'm possible.'"

"Believe."

Ted Lasso in the recently concluded streaming TV series

"Reality is just source material. All your background, your bad experiences and your good ones, are just what you decide to make of them day-to-day."

Leila Janah (quoted in item #1)

"You have to be open and alert at every turn to the possibility that you're about to learn the most important lesson of your life."

Former college president Ruth Simmons (quoted in *ibid.*)

"We are all storytellers. We all live in a network of stories. There isn't a stronger connection between people than storytelling."

Jimmy Neil Smith (quoted in item #6)

"By viewing errors with a sense of curiosity and inquiry, teachers can communicate to children that errors are a natural and constructive part of the learning process and reduce fear or hesitation children may have around making errors."

Clariebell Gabas, Laura Cutler, and Rachel Schachter (see item #5)

1. Advice for New Leaders

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Adam Bryant (ExCo Group) has suggestions for a person promoted to a senior leadership position:

• *Be clear about what you stand for*. "Your team will be looking for signs that you're a steady presence," says Bryant, "someone who won't abandon your values for personal gain or when under duress." Think through answers to questions like these:

- What three values are most important to me as a leader and colleague?
- How have I lived them in my career?
- Why are they important to driving success?
- How would a team member describe them?

Use the answers to craft a clear, succinct, consistent elevator speech answering the question, *Who are you as a leader? What do you care most about?*

• *Hone your decision-making*. "As you move up, the problems you encounter will become harder and more complicated," says Bryant, "and you'll be more accountable for your decisions. You'll have to make more gut calls because tougher problems often provide less data to draw on." Some pointers:

- Look in the "ugly mirror" – see the problems the organization actually faces.
- Beware of the "logic box" – examine underlying assumptions that may be faulty.
- Get all the input you can from your team.
- Listen carefully, but be decisive and take charge when it's time.
- Provide context and explain your thinking.

• *Set the bar for your team's performance*. There's a Goldilocks level for expectations – not too high, not too low – but it's not static. "It's like a big sound-mixing board," says tech CEO Andrew Durand, "and you're constantly trying to keep the organization in balance. You don't control the external environment, and things are always changing – which means you're constantly changing your balance."

• *Master the art of compartmentalization*. "Just as it's your job to set the pace for your team, you need to set the pace for yourself," says Bryant. "That's hard when you're faced with tight deadlines, people problems, crises, and the pressure to do more with less." His advice:

- Stay focused on what matters most – keep the main thing the main thing.
- Don't let people hijack your schedule with lower-level problems; focus on the big picture.
- Delegate and ask for help. You can't do everything yourself.
- Don't self-flagellate.

- When tough personnel decisions loom, deal with people who aren't pulling their weight, based on what's best for the organization.

• *Build self-awareness*. "Everything you say and do has an outsize impact," says Bryant. People are studying you closely and will project meaning onto every gesture and offhand comment. Pointers:

- Keep your emotions in check. "Being authentic doesn't mean sharing every feeling in real time," he says.
- Know your triggers. "Everyone has some emotional scar tissue, and certain circumstances remind us of the experiences that caused it."
- Uncover blind spots, especially gaps between how you think you're leading and how your colleagues see it.

A good question to periodically ask colleagues: *What do you need me to do more of, less of, or differently to better help you?*

• *Craft your personal narrative*. Bryant lists some insights for leaders as they decide on the stories they choose to tell about themselves, and the stories others tell:

- Don't let fear of being fired stop you; do your job as if you have nothing to lose. Ask "What's the worst thing that could happen?" and think through what that would mean.
- Be positive. Bryant quotes Leila Janah, who had an exceptionally tough childhood before becoming a successful executive: "Reality is just source material. All your background, your bad experiences and your good ones, are just what you decide to make of them day-to-day."
- When colleagues veer into a negative narrative, say, "Help me understand that." It's an indirect way of saying that there might be a different way to look at it.
- Don't be a victim, falling into the belief that you have no control over events. "When you're a victim, you're not owning or fixing anything," said CEO Seth Besmertnik.

In that vein, Bryant quotes Ruth Simmons, former college president, on the advice she gave to students: "You have to be open and alert at every turn to the possibility that you're about to learn the most important lesson of your life."

"The Leap to Leader" by Adam Bryant in *Harvard Business Review*, July/August 2023 (Vol. 101, #4, pp. 96-105)

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2. Intellectual Humility As an Antidote to the "Certainty Trap"

In this article in *Psychology Today*, Bruce Grierson says that in an age of hardened positions on many issues, it's smart to begin a potentially contentious conversation curious, humble, and open. "The more diverse perspectives we entertain," says Grierson, "the smaller our blind spots and the wiser our decision-making will generally be." He suggests eight ways to foster intellectual humility:

• *Know when you don't know what you're talking about*. "We think we know more than we do," says Grierson. "Our intuitions about what we're right or wrong about are faulty."

That's because of *overconfidence bias* – the common tendency to believe that our knowledge, abilities, and beliefs are superior to what they really are. There's also the tendency to forget situations when we revised our position, and believe that how we feel in the moment is correct.

• *Curiosity is key*. "Curious people ask a lot of questions," says Grierson, "and that is a sneaky superpower in a culture obsessed with answers. Social curiosity, it turns out, is a particularly potent attribute – an interest in other people's behaviors, thoughts, and feelings" – in other words, what makes them tick. A questioning mindset has a direct effect on the potential for conflict: "When you're genuinely curious, it's harder to be judgmental," he says, "and when you're judgmental, it's harder to be genuinely curious." Adam Grant (University of Pennsylvania) suggests this question when someone is coming on strong with a contrary position: "How did you arrive at that view? I'm really curious."

• *Not everything should be reconsidered*. Everyone has strong beliefs where they're not willing to give ground, but this tendency seems to be proliferating, says Grierson. "We should probably keep our number of no-go zones to a small handful of genuinely inviolable offenses: human trafficking or child abuse, for sure, hold the line. But maybe not Beatles vs. Stones."

• *Civil disagreement is a healthy part of life*. "People should disagree," says Grierson. "A population that's all in line is not a healthy population. This is about how we disagree and learn to disagree well." The writer Ezra Klein has noticed that when he writes an article, he becomes more convinced of his position, but when he engages in a discussion with others, his viewpoint becomes more nuanced.

• *Proximity helps*. Braver Angels is an organization in the Northwest that brings people of opposite political persuasions together for face-to-face discussions. Participants are encouraged to ask, *If people are voting opposite me, are they feeling opposite me on the issues that matter to me? Or is there something I'm missing?* Supposed antagonists are often surprised by the complexity and plausibility of each others' stories and reasoning.

• *It's possible to be too humble and submissive*. The full continuum goes from arrogance to abject servility, says Grierson, with intellectual humility being the sweet spot in the middle. To find that happy medium, we should ask ourselves how much we know (and can learn) about a subject and always consider the possibility that we're mistaken. He also cautions against false humility (*Okay, I admit I could be wrong*), which can be "stealth arrogance."

• *Artificial intelligence isn't self-critical*. "While chatbots appear to be thinking deeply," says Grierson, "what they're really doing is just pattern-matching, with no sensitivity to whether the correlations they detect are meaningful." Don't trust them to be humble or wise.

• *People arrive at truth collaboratively*. "The more we know, the more we realize how much we don't know," says Grierson. "We peer from the crater rim of the known unknowns into the vast caldera of the unknown unknowns." Collaborating with others is the smartest way to get closer to the truth – as elusive as it is.

"The Certainty Trap" by Bruce Grierson in *Psychology Today*, July/August 2023 (Vol. 56, #4, pp. 38-44)

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3. New York City Teachers' Everyday Perceptions of Social Class

In this *Teachers College Record* article, Debbie Sonu (Hunter College, New York) and Karen Zaino (Miami University, Ohio) report on their study in which 57 New York City teachers in a variety of elementary schools were asked:

- In what ways does social class appear in your classroom?
- Describe a moment in your classroom or school when social class mattered. What happened? Where did this moment occur? Who was involved? What happened at the end?

"It was clear from the outset," say Sonu and Zaino, "that the ubiquitous and far-reaching effects of economic inequality and its hierarchizing consequences reached deeply into the relationships forged between teachers, students, and their families." The researchers documented this in four areas:

• *Material disparities and access among students* – "Class was literally brought into schools through the students' devices, clothes, and shoes; the upkeep of their belongings; and their weekend and holiday plans," say Sonu and Zaino. Teachers frequently dealt with teasing, put-downs, and ridicule among students related to indicators of their families' economic status.

• *Family engagement and relations* – Some of the teachers in the study had deep empathy with families struggling with poverty, joblessness, racial issues, immigration status, and the Covid-19 pandemic and made extra efforts to connect with and support them. Other teachers were more judgmental about children's tardiness and difficulty with homework, pointing to parents' inability or unwillingness to do better.

• *School-based inequalities and efforts* – "Efforts to overcome [class-based] differences," say Sonu and Zaino, "such as enforcing school uniforms, avoiding discussions involving displays of wealth or privilege, or, in some cases, supplementing the cost of activities for low-income families, were, from the participants' perspectives, largely ineffective in removing the stigma of being poor as well as the lack of access to resources and activities."

• *Teachers' subjective reactions and connections* – A few of the teachers in the study had experienced poverty growing up and strongly identified with their lower-income families' challenges and difficulties. But almost all of the teachers dealt with class-based teasing and negative aspersions as interpersonal problems to be solved so the class could move forward, rather than something to be addressed in the curriculum. Although most teachers said they would like to teach more about economic inequality, race, and class dynamics, the lack of curriculum materials or support held them back.

Sonu and Zaino hope their study, despite its small sample size, is "one step in encouraging future researchers, curriculum developers, teacher educators, districts, and administrators to acknowledge how social class is woven into the very fabric of school teaching, to listen to how economic inequality appears in a range of intersubjective and structural ways, and to use teachers' experiences to open up more honest and productive conversations about what schools, curriculum, pedagogy, and activism can do to materialize a world less harmed by the extreme and ever-growing crisis between the wealthy few and the overwhelming majority who are facing economic hardship and struggle today."

"Breaking Light on Economic Divide: How Elementary School Teachers Locate Class Inequality in Teaching and Schools" by Debbie Sonu and Karen Zaino in *Teachers College Record*, April 2023 (Vol. 125, #4, pp. 39-66); the authors can be reached at dsonu@huntersoe.org and zainok@MiamiOH.edu,

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4. Real-Time Instructional Coaching: Can It Work?

In this *Journal of the Learning Sciences* article, Jen Munson (Northwestern University) and Elizabeth Dyer (University of Tennessee/Knoxville) report on their analysis of a teacher and instructional coach interacting side-by-side during a lesson. They believe this unusual approach to professional development creates opportunities for:

- Shared reflections on moments of instruction;
- Immediate feedback for the teacher;
- Discussions of instructional decisions in real time;
- Immediate support for the teacher as problems emerge;
- The coach modeling effective practices.

"While the coach and the teacher may share the same experiences," say Munson and Dyer, "each has different perspectives on what happens. Additionally, the coach and teacher can each play a role in what the other thinks about and pays attention to both during and after a lesson." The challenge, of course, is simultaneously juggling teaching and coaching.

This article is part of a larger study in a California elementary school whose teachers had reached out to university educators for help implementing an inquiry-based math program. "The broad goals of the side-by-side coaching," say Munson and Dyer, "were to support teachers to uncover, notice, and interpret student thinking during collaborative group work, and build discursive tools for responding to that thinking in the moment."

Several teachers engaged in side-by-side coaching following this model: each teacher planned and led the lesson; teacher and coach met briefly before the lesson; they interacted while walking around observing students at work in groups; teacher and coach then debriefed after the lesson. Videos were made of multiple coaching sessions and the researchers chose one to analyze for this article. In it, Munson does side-by-side coaching with a fourth-grade teacher during a lesson on restocking a vending machine. Students were working on this question: How many six-packs of water would be needed to fill a machine that holds 156 bottles?

After studying the video of the lesson, Munson and Dyer have several observations. Teacher-coach discourse happened throughout, with more frequent and in-depth interchanges in the last ten minutes. Interactions included "within moments" conversations about what students were working on in their groups; "across moments" comments linking what students were doing at different points in the lesson; and "beyond moments" comments drawing cumulative generalizations. Two examples: one group of students had "blank stares" and the teacher and coach realized the kids didn't understand the task; at another point, the teacher wondered if she should ask a probing question and walk away, letting students continue on their own, or stick around for a more-extended conversation.

Munson and Dyer report that the teacher was very pleased with in-the-moment coaching and list what they believe are clear advantages to the model. "Teacher-coach talk," they say, "was consistently anchored in evidence that was co-witnessed and visible to both the teacher and coach… The use of evidence served to focus joint attention on details that may well not be memorable later and make them salient, allowing participants to jointly examine the work of teaching and learning… Connections between specific classroom experiences and more-general pedagogical ideas are considered especially important for collaborative teacher learning and have been documented among teachers that are consistently responsive to student thinking and teachers who are developing responsive classroom practices."

Munson and Dyer continue: "Shared experience in pedagogy allowed each participant the opportunity to notice events, bringing with them different bodies of knowledge, experiences, biases, and beliefs. The interactions between the coach and teacher, then, could include influencing what one another notices, how [each] interpreted the events, and how the coach and teacher chose to situate these ideas in a larger framework of sensemaking… Sensemaking throughout the lesson was tightly coupled with experience, where the details were fresh, shared, and subject to active interpretation."

How does in-the-moment coaching fit with other forms of professional learning, including teacher and coach talking after a lesson and teacher team discussions? Compared to standard after-lesson teacher-coach conversations, side-by-side coaching has two advantages: it captures details that may not surface later, and it's time-efficient since it takes place while the teacher teaches. Compared to teacher teamwork, say Munson and Dyer, "the data here show that pedagogical sensemaking in an active instructional context looks and sounds different from that in teacher workgroups, and each has value for teacher learning. While teacher workgroups provide the opportunity for sustained reflection and planning, classroom-based coaching offers focused bursts of sensemaking about cases of student thinking, teaching, and learning."

Munson and Dyer stress the need for professional development for coaches in the fine art of in-the-moment coaching, probably using videos of lessons and coaching sessions, and call for more research on this approach.

"Pedagogical Sensemaking During Side-by-Side Coaching: Examining the In-the-Moment Discursive Reasoning of a Teacher and Coach" by Jen Munson and Elizabeth Dyer in *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, April-June 2023 (Vol. 32, #2, pp. 171-201); the authors can be reached at jmunson@northwestern.edu and edyer8@utk.edu.

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5. Effectively Handling Children's Errors in Early Childhood Classrooms

"Errors that occur during emergent literacy activities have the potential to negatively impact children's learning if they are not properly addressed or are simply ignored," say Clariebell Gabas and Rachel Schachter (University of Nebraska/Lincoln) and Laura Cutler (Ohio State University) in this article in *The Reading Teacher*. "This is because errors often happen in the space between what children already know or can do independently and what

they have yet to learn, commonly referred to as the *zone of proximal development*… Ignoring children's errors disregards children as sense-makers, which can have adverse effects on children's confidence as learners. A teacher who does not acknowledge a child's incorrect response or calls on another child for the correct answer may inadvertently make the first child feel less willing to take intellectual risks for fear of looking incompetent or being wrong."

Gabas, Schachter, and Cutler studied 400 classrooms and found that effectively responding to students' errors was a key factor in the 30 classrooms where students made the best language gains, in striking contrast to the 30 classrooms where students gained the least. In the highest-gaining classrooms, teachers created a challenging learning environment and used students' errors as opportunities to enhance knowledge and understanding. In the lowest-gaining classrooms, there was less challenge, students made fewer errors, and when they did, teachers either ignored them or addressed them in ways that didn't scaffold children's learning. Gabas, Schachter, and Cutler used their research to suggest the following framework:

• Step 1: Give students appropriately challenging work. This means introducing new concepts and vocabulary, helping children build connections from prior knowledge to new content, and engaging them in open-ended activities that allow them to explore and incorporate their own language and ideas.

• Step 2: Create an "error-safe," growth-mindset classroom culture. "By viewing errors with a sense of curiosity and inquiry," say the authors, "teachers can communicate to children that errors are a natural and constructive part of the learning process and reduce fear or hesitation children may have around making errors." Students see that their misunderstandings, misconceptions, learning attempts, and approximations aren't failures to learn but evidence that they haven't learned *yet*. Teachers can do this by referring to an error as a "fantastic attempt," reading books that feature characters making mistakes, modeling making and admitting errors themselves, encouraging students to test their ideas, and saying frequently that errors are a natural part of learning and it's okay to ask for help.

• Step 3: When a student makes an error, recognize its nature: why it was made and what it reveals about a child's current knowledge and understanding. The mistake could be because the child wasn't paying attention and needs to be refocused; it may reveal a misconception; or it may be the logical result of not having learned something yet.

• Step 4: Respond to the error in a way that extends children's knowledge and understanding. For example, if children read *Gram* as *Gracie*, the teacher can help students zero in on the beginning and ending letters of each name. Or if a child says that spring is a holiday, the teacher can correct the misconception and clarify the difference between seasons and holidays. Teachers must constantly decide how directive to be with students' mistakes, choosing between:

- Accept an error that is logically correct, given students' current knowledge – for example, in the word *hedgehog*, a student thought the *dge* sound was *j*.
- Correct the error and discuss – for example, correcting a child who thought a fiction text was nonfiction. This is the best response when children need the correct

information to move the lesson forward, with the teacher providing it in the most expeditious way.

- Lead students to the correct answer with specific prompts or questions – for example, a child says yo-yo and yogurt are rhyming words and the teacher provides scaffolding until the child sees the difference.

"Making Mistakes: Children's Errors As Opportunities for Emergent Literacy Learning in Early Childhood" by Clariebell Gabas, Laura Cutler, and Rachel Schachter in *The Reading Teacher*, May/June 2023 (Vol. 76, #6, pp. 664-672); the authors can be reached at mgabas2@unl.edu, cutler.98@osu.edu, and rschachter2@unl.edu.

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6. Picture Books for Reading Aloud in Math Classes

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Mollie Welsh Kruger (Bank Street College of Education) and Grace Enriquez (Lesley University) quote Jimmy Neil Smith:

> *We are all storytellers. We all live in a network of stories. There isn't a stronger connection between people than storytelling*.

Picture books tell stories, and Kruger and Enriquez believe reading well-chosen books aloud can bring joy and alleviate anxiety in math classes. Here are some recommendations:

- *Maryam's Magic: The Story of Mathematician Maryam Mirzakhani* by Megan Reid, illustrated by Aaliya Jaleel
- *Dream Builder: The Story of Architect Philip Freelon* by Kelly Starling Lyons, illustrated by Laura Freeman
- *Small World* by Ishta Mercurio, illustrated by Jen Carace
- *Uma Wimple Charts Her House* by Reif Larsen, illustrated by Ben Gibson

Kruger and Enriquez also provide links to three lists of math picture books:

- Bank Street Children's Book Committee Best Book of the Year List (birth-18)
- The Cook Prize honoring outstanding STEM picture books (8-10)
- Mathical Book Prize for outstanding fiction and literary nonfiction for children (2-18)

"Math and Picture Books: Story, Math Anxiety, and Building Joy" by Mollie Welsh Kruger and Grace Enriquez in *The Reading Teacher*, May/June 2023 (Vol. 76, #6, pp. 735-739); the authors can be reached at mwelshkruger@bankstreet.edu and genrique@lesley.edu.

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7. The Most Popular High-School Plays and Musicals of 2022-23

In this NPR story, Elizabeth Blair reports on the results of a survey of U.S. high schools on the top ten plays and musicals performed this school year in these categories:

Full-length musicals:	Full-length plays:
The Addams Family	*Clue*
Mamma Mia!	*Puffs*
Into the Woods	*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Little Shop of Horrors
Disney's Beauty and the Beast
Disney's Little Mermaid
The SpongeBob Musical
Chicago: Teen Edition
Legally Blonde: The Musical
Mean Girls: High School Version

Short musicals:
Disney's Frozen JR
Roald Dahl's Matilda: The Musical JR
Disney's Newsies JR
Roald Dahl's *Willy Wonka JR*
Annie JR
Disney's High School Musical JR
= Disney's The Little Mermaid JR
= Shrek: The Musical JR
The Addams Family Young@Part
= Disney's The Lion King JR
= Seussical JR

= The Play That Goes Wrong
= Radium Girls
Almost, Maine
= Peter and the Starcatcher
= She Kills Monsters: Young Adventurers
Alice in Wonderland
12 Angry Jurors

Short plays:
10 Ways to Survive Zombie Apocalypse
Check Please
The Brothers Grimm Spectaculathon (One-Act)
Bad Auditions by Bad Actors
The One-Act Play Disaster
Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind
13 Ways to Screw Up Your College Interview
= Our Place
= Tracks
= 15 Reasons Not to Be in a Play
= Game of Tiaras (One-Act)
= The Greek Mythology Olympiaganza (One-Act)
= The 9 Worst Breakups of All Time

"These Were the Most Frequently Performed Plays and Musicals in High Schools This Year" by Elizabeth Blair in NPR, June 5, 2023

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8. Short Items:

a. Frederick Douglass's July 4th Speech – Check out this extraordinary video of direct descendants of Frederick Douglass reading excerpts of his "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" speech (NPR, 2020)

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b. Movie clips for classroom use – ClassHook is a website with more than 7,000 short movie segments that can be used in history, ELA, math, science, health, ethics, business, and SEL classes. Here's a fun example: an Abbott and Costello routine showing three incorrect methods for getting the same wrong answer: 7 x 13 = 28.

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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 48 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

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