

Marshall Memo 899

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 23, 2021

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Quotes of the Week

“Those who don’t remember the past are condemned to repeat the 11th grade.”

James Loewen, who died last week at 79, in his 1995 book *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*

“History is neither in the business of self-congratulation nor self-flagellation. History is in the truth business.”

Simon Schama in [“America’s History Wars, Race, and the Flag”](#) in *The Financial Times*, July 7, 2021

“If we accept the learning-loss narrative, we’re more likely to focus on remediation, which would mean slowing down and focusing on isolated skills. This makes students feel punished, embarrassed, and inferior. Often, they are bored in remediation efforts and pay little attention to the experience. Instead, we should focus on acceleration.”

Nancy Frey and Douglas Fisher in [“Five Strategies for Implementing Accelerated Learning”](#) in *Education Week*, August 16, 2021

“The lack of positive, people-focused stories for boys has consequences both for them and girls. In the narratives they consume, as well as the broader cultural landscape in which they operate, girls get a huge head start on relational skills, in the day-to-day thorniness and complexity of emotional life. Story by story, girls are getting the message that other people’s feelings are their concern and their responsibility. Boys are learning that these things have nothing to do with them.”

Ruth Whippman in [“Let’s Teach Boys the Art of Emotional Labor”](#) in *The New York Times*, August 9, 2021

“Just as shouting doesn’t enable a deaf person to hear, or better lighting a blind person to see, feeding facts and figures to youngsters with untreated health problems is unlikely to help them learn.”

Jane Brody in [“When School Nurses Are Not Enough”](#) in *The New York Times*, August 10, 2021

“What did you long for when we couldn’t physically meet? What did you not miss and are ready to discard? What forms of meeting did you invent during the pandemic out of necessity that, surprisingly, worked? What might we experiment with now?”

Priya Parker in [“How Should We Meet? And Who Decides?”](#) in *The New York Times*, August 20, 2021

1. Deciding Between Virtual and In-Person Meetings

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, executive coach Rae Ringel (Georgetown University, the Ringel Group) suggests six questions to help decide when meetings should be face to face and when they should be remote:

- *Should this even be a meeting?* “Now that serendipitous in-person interactions are possible,” says Ringel, “and now that we know how to do virtual work well, let’s think very carefully about whether time spent meeting might be better spent thinking, writing, or engaging in other projects.” If the purpose of the meeting is sharing information, that can probably be done more efficiently in writing. But if the purpose is to brainstorm and build off one another’s ideas, in person makes sense.

- *Are my meeting goals relationship-based or task-based?* Tasks like updates and planning events are best handled in virtual meetings (or via e-mail). If the goal is strengthening or repairing connections among team members and conveying difficult feedback, in person is usually best. “Challenging group conversations should also take place in person,” says Ringel, “where destructive and distracting parallel side chats can’t overshadow the central discussion.” That said, she’s found during the pandemic that for some people, “the screen creates a sense of psychological safety, and with it the freedom to share views and take risks.”

- *How complex are my objectives?* In-person meetings are almost always better when goals are complex – for example, conflict mediation, leadership development, team building, group forming, performance reviews, and group coaching. More straightforward goals like updates and skills training can be done virtually.

- *Could my meeting take an entirely different form?* For example, key information might be shared via a prerecorded video that colleagues can watch while they exercise or prepare dinner, with an optional follow-up Q&A. Asynchronous videos have the added advantage that they can be watched more than once. “This approach honors different types of learners,” says Ringel; “some of us actually retain information better when we’re able to multitask.” She’s also experimented with using breakout rooms during meetings with a scribe in each “room” taking notes in a Google doc, and then having the whole group take a “gallery walk” to review the notes from other groups. This avoids what she calls “death by report back,” in which everyone has to sit through one group summary after another while at the same time figuring out what they’re going to say.

- *What kind of meeting will be most inclusive?* During the pandemic, Ringel has been surprised by the way virtual meetings have opened participation in key meetings to people in other time zones – and working parents – who were previously unable to take part. Going forward, her group at Georgetown University will conduct half of its international meetings virtually, half in person.

- *Does my facilitator have the skills and tech setup to pull off a hybrid gathering?* The skillset and technology involved in running hybrid meetings (some people in person, some remote) is formidable, says Ringel. She suggests that if everybody can’t be there in person, have all-remote meetings until fully in-person meetings are possible. The only exception is if the leader is truly adept at handling hybrid meetings.

[“When Do We Actually Need to Meet in Person?”](#) by Rae Ringel in *Harvard Business Review*, July 26, 2021

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2. Putting a Positive Spin on Wearing Masks in School

In this *New York Times* article, Judith Danovitch (University of Louisville) acknowledges parents’ and educators’ concern that masks in school may compromise children’s ability to learn language and socialize. It’s certainly true that masks have been “inconvenient, uncomfortable, and bothersome,” she says, but cites five reasons not to worry.

- “Children in cultures where caregivers and educators wear head coverings that obscure their mouths and noses develop skills just as children in other cultures,” says Danovitch. “Even congenitally blind children – who cannot see faces at all – still learn to speak, read, and get along with other people.”

- There’s evidence that wearing a mask in school can improve some social-emotional and cognitive skills, including self-control and paying attention. When they can’t see people’s mouths, students need to pay more attention to their eyes (already an important source of cues), as well as prosody, gestures, and context to understand what’s being said. “A classroom full of people wearing masks,” says Danovitch, “is a great opportunity for children to practice paying attention to those cues, such as a peer’s tone of voice or a teacher’s body language.”

- Wearing a mask all day teaches self-control and self-regulation. Younger children have to resist the urge to pull the mask off, and everyone needs to monitor the position of their

masks and know when it's okay to take it off. "For children who habitually bite their nails or pick their nose," says Danovitch, "a mask could also be precisely what they need to kick the habit."

- Mask wearing gives students important insights on how germs spread from person to person. The counterintuitive notion that invisible particles coming out of a person's mouth can transmit a disease is being driven home to everyone during the pandemic.

- Wearing masks can make children feel part of a community effort to bring the coronavirus under control. "Stressing that the discomfort and inconvenience of mask wearing are forms of generosity and public service," says Danovitch, "might motivate children to address other social problems in their lives – like bullying."

["Masks Can In Fact Help Kids Learn"](#) by Judith Danovitch in *The New York Times*, August 19, 2021; Danovitch can be reached at j.danovitch@louisville.edu.

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3. U.S. History: What Should Be Taught, and Who Decides?

In this *Education Week* article, Sarah Schwartz summarizes the complicated question of who gets to decide what history content is taught in U.S. schools. This is especially relevant to educators because a number of states are passing laws limiting what's taught about racism, slavery, and other contentious chapters of the nation's history. A recurring theme in these laws is forbidding lessons that might make students feel ashamed of their racial group.

Actually, says Schwartz, battles over the history curriculum are nothing new; for decades, competing interest groups have argued over what should be included – and excluded. Some key background on current curriculum decisions:

- There is no national history/civics curriculum; each state decides what will be taught.
- States make decisions based on recommendations by committees of educators, state education agency specialists, scholars, and community members.
- State standards are revised periodically, usually every 7-10 years.
- There have been impassioned debates over a variety of hot topics and how they should be taught.
- The Thomas B. Fordham Institute recently released a critical review of state standards, giving high marks to only a few.
- In 1992, a major attempt at a national history curriculum involving almost 200 contributors sparked intense opposition and was condemned by the U.S. Senate by a vote of 99-1.
- A more-recent attempt at national guidelines – the C3 Framework from the National Council for the Social Studies – is quite broad in scope, with four overarching skills.
- Advanced Placement U.S. history is the one course with a uniform set of history standards; AP history has had its share of debates and revisions, the most recent on how "American exceptionalism" should be treated.

- Earlier in 2021, a panel of academics, educators, and civic nonprofit leaders released a history/civics framework, Roadmap to Educating for American Democracy, touting a theme of “reflective patriotism” – a commitment to ideals with an awareness of flaws.
- This summer, Johns Hopkins University produced a series of “knowledge maps” of what’s covered and omitted in various curriculum materials, working backward from college-level proficiency.
- In terms of teaching materials, about half of the states develop lists of approved textbooks, workbooks, videos, etc.; some of these states have waiver clauses.
- Given the variety of standards, publishers customize editions for different states, and other groups create standalone materials – for example, Facing History and Ourselves.
- Districts and states also develop or purchase specific curriculum materials – for example, Chicago’s unit on the history of police brutality in the city.
- In addition, teachers acquire materials through portals like Teachers Pay Teachers and create their own units and lessons.
- Compared to other core subjects, there’s little vetting of the available history materials; from time to time, there is a fuss about a particularly horrible lesson – for example, a “slave auction” in which students are asked to play-act the sale of enslaved people.
- “Because there are so many different resources available,” says Schwartz, “and because the landscape is so fragmented, it’s very difficult to say definitively what materials teachers are actually using in classrooms – despite the existence of state-approved adoption lists.”
- The most important thing that’s missing, Schwartz concludes, is a national consensus on what should be taught at each grade level, including guidance for educators and communities on how to handle the hot topics that are sparking so much debate.

[“Who Decides What History We Teach? An Explainer”](#) by Sarah Schwartz in *Education Week*, August 11, 2021

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4. Teaching an Untracked 10th-Grade English Class

In this article in *English Journal*, Idaho teacher Paula Uriarte says that four years ago, her principal asked her to teach an untracked sophomore English course. This was a departure from the “accelerated” and “regular” approach the school had been using for years. Some teachers pushed back, arguing that teaching heterogeneous groups would result in fewer students being prepared to take AP English as juniors and seniors.

Uriarte took on the challenge, spending the summer researching untracked classes, consulting with a university colleague, and hosting planning meetings with other sophomore English teachers. She’d had concerns about tracking, remembering how the least experienced teachers often worked with the lower-track classes and people “are surprised when they burn out or get overwhelmed or don’t want to teach those classes.” As Uriarte planned for the year ahead, she resisted the strategy that some of her colleagues were discussing: a two-tiered

curriculum with “high” and “low” lesson plans. Instead she adopted a metaphor suggested by her husband: mac and cheese.

As the school year began, Uriarte focused on creating a classroom culture of high expectations. Students read articles on the importance of literacy (which connected to reading Steinbeck’s *The Pearl* and Orwell’s *Animal Farm* later in the year), and she promoted the idea of everyone taking AP English down the road. Everyone drafted and shared commitments for the year, and some students expressed surprise that a teacher was making promises about her work. One suggested, “Can you add something about making assignment expectations clear?” Others wanted Uriarte to add language about inspiring and motivating them. She made revisions and posted her commitments beside those of the students.

Then Uriarte introduced the metaphor. She got out boxes of Kraft Macaroni and Cheese and asked students what was needed to prepare the meal. They listed the basic steps: go to the store, buy the ingredients, boil water, etc. This, she said, represented the basic level of procedural knowledge that would be required for each assignment. Uriarte then showed more-elaborate mac and cheese recipes that called for “folding,” “browning,” and more. This represented the next level: mastery of the English 10 standards. Finally she had students read blog posts in which serious mac and cheese aficionados debated whether to start with a roux, made connections between childhood experiences with choices of ingredients, and experimented with different cheeses and other permutations. This level represented higher-level mastery and application of standards.

Uriarte explained that all students must show proficiency at the “Kraft” level, and would then have the choice of pursuing challenges that pushed them to the two higher conceptual levels. “Any student could take the challenge at any time,” she says. “I explained that my job was to prepare them to take AP classes during their junior and senior years if they chose to. We celebrated with bowls of Costco mac and cheese.”

How did this differentiated, tiered curriculum work out? Many students went beyond the minimum requirements, including some who started the year with the “regular” designation. Some “accelerated” students chose not to go beyond the basic assignments. Looking at the number of missed assignments that year, Uriarte says they were spread more or less equally among “regular” and “accelerated” students. One student who was frequently in trouble in the school excelled in the English course, winning plaudits from her external partners and earning a trip to Washington, D.C. There were some speed bumps that year: a student from Myanmar and another from Iraq started the year knowing little English; another had a stroke that left him unable to speak; another was sent to in-school suspension every time the class had a substitute teacher.

But the most important metric was a marked increase in Uriarte’s students who enrolled in AP English the next year (or English 101 for concurrent credit). And at the end of their senior year, 85 percent of the original sophomore class graduated – and the student from Myanmar not only mastered English but won the Mayor’s Award for Youth and is now studying to be an elementary teacher.

When Uriarte asked seniors about the mac and cheese lesson, they remembered the metaphor and said the untracked class had prepared them for challenges they took on afterward. “Armed with their stories,” she concludes, “I also feel more prepared to argue for how to give all students access to challenging curriculum.”

[“On the Mac-and-Cheese Continuum”](#) by Paula Uriarte in *English Journal*, July 2021 (Vol. 110, #6, pp. 13-15); Uriarte can be reached at paula.uriarte@boiseschools.org.

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5. Helping Students Do Better with Mathematics Word Problems

In this article in *Teaching Mathematics: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, Melissa Gallagher and Travis Weiland (University of Houston) and math teacher Laura Ellis say that on math standardized tests, many students are proficient with the computation items but do less well with word problems. The authors believe this happens because:

- Students dive into word problems without understanding the situation presented.
- Students are taught to rely on key words to decide which operations to use.
- Students plug in the numbers and solve without making sense of the problem.

Another issue is that the word problems in tests tend to have low cognitive demand and don't engage students in lively mathematical thinking.

Gallagher, Ellis, and Weiland believe students learn reading comprehension strategies in their ELA classes and should be explicitly encouraged to apply those strategies to math problems: visualizing, retelling, making connections, and asking questions. One difference: the authors suggest initially presenting word problems without numbers and without the solve-the-problem question at the end, then having students work in pairs, introducing the full problems, and finally having a whole-class discussion of effective strategies. Here's how the reading strategies are applied:

- *Visualizing* – Students create a mental image as they read the problem – a picture of what's going on, and a schematic representation of the math involved. “When teaching students to use visualization in mathematics,” say the authors, “teachers should encourage students to make a movie in their minds and to draw either pictorial or schematic representations of the situation.”

- *Retelling* – Students recap the main ideas of the problem with a partner, in their own words, including as many details as possible (but not the numbers or the final question).

- *Making connections* – As they retell the word problem, students make personal and mathematical connections. An example of each: “My mom and I feed the ducks at the lake!” and “There are two types of ducks, but they're both part of the whole group of ducks.” Making connections may be challenging if students lack personal connections to the math problem.

- *Asking questions* – Students use questions to clarify what's going on and make connections *before* they start to do the math. “Inviting students to ask their own questions about the problem,” say Gallagher, Ellis, and Weiland, “positions them as problem posers and provides them more agency to solve the problem once the question is posed.”

The goal of all this, they conclude, is “to get students talking about word problems and thinking about them deeply.” The authors don’t recommend having students memorize and recapitulate the steps; research has shown this to be an ineffective strategy. Rather, the process of visualizing, retelling, making connections, and asking questions should become part of the classroom culture, so students can tackle new word problems without the need for prompts.

[“Making Word Problems Meaningful”](#) by Melissa Gallagher, Laura Ellis, and Travis Weiland in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, August 2021 (Vol. 114, #8, pp. 580-590); the authors can be reached at magallagher2@uh.edu, lellis@capeelizabethschools.org, and tweiland@uh.edu.

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6. Parental Advice on Getting Smartphones for Kids

In this *Wall Street Journal* article, Julie Jargon has words of wisdom for parents on smartphones for children:

- *The right age* – According to a 2019 survey, about 53 percent of U.S. kids have a smartphone by the time they are 11. Sixth grade, the beginning of middle school, seems to be the age when many parents say yes to a smartphone. More important than age, says Jargon, is maturity – for example, a track record of getting homework done on time, taking care of possessions, keeping a tablet or laptop charged, and being able to defer gratification (will they be able to resist texting in class?). Another consideration is whether a child needs to be in touch while taking public transportation, or depends on reminders about medications. There’s a trade-off between being constantly in touch and learning how to cope independently.

- *Social pressure* – In elementary school, some classmates have smartphones, which creates a desire among peers to be part of online interactions – texting, TikTok, and other social media. Some parents have joined *Wait Until 8th* to counter peer pressure and say no to smartphones until eighth grade. To create a critical mass, this organization requires that at least ten families from a child’s grade and school take the pledge.

- *Choosing a phone* – An important strategy, says Jargon, is getting a phone with the same operating system (iOS or Android) as the parents’ phones. This makes it easier for family members to message one another – and for adults to set up parental controls and screen-time limits. It’s also important to buy a protection plan – or at least a durable case. For younger children who aren’t ready for a smartphone, there are smart watches like Gabb’s version and the GizmoWatch2 that can keep kids in touch without giving them Internet access.

- *Responsible use* – Ground rules are essential from the start, says Jargon, along with clear consequences for breaking the rules, damage, and loss. There’s a strong consensus on having phones at a charging station outside kids’ bedrooms at night, and parents need to set other limits on social media and when and where phones can be used. Common Sense Media has a [model agreement template](#) for this.

[“Your Child’s First Smartphone: A Guide to the Proper Age, Phone Type, and Parental Controls”](#) by Julie Jargon in *The Wall Street Journal*, August 14, 2021; Jargon can be reached at julie.jargon@wsj.com.

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7. Words of Wisdom for Rookie Teachers

In this *Education Week* article, Hayley Hardison reports the responses to her outreach via Twitter for advice for beginning teachers in five words or less. A selection:

- Start smiling on day one.
- Relationships matter more than anything.
- Enjoy your students, be yourself.
- Make them believe they can.
- Find teammates that inspire you.
- Find a mentor to trust.
- Always ask for help.
- Classroom procedures are top priority!
- Don't reinvent the wheel.
- Direct, explicit instruction works best.
- Monitor and adjust.
- Protect your mental health/wellbeing.
- Get the vaccine!
- Have an identity beyond work.
- Leave no later than 6pm.
- It is all about balance!
- Give yourself grace every day.
- Embrace the chaos. Enjoy it.
- The first version isn't perfect.
- Embrace not knowing everything.
- Teachers are still students.
- You'll get better.
- Never forget why you began.

["The Best Advice for New Teachers, in 5 Words or Less"](#) by Hayley Hardison in *Education Week*, August 18, 2021

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8. Curiosity As a Key to Good Leadership

In this *Leadership Freak* article, Dan Rockwell says being curious is an important professional trait, and suggests questions leaders should ask of themselves and their colleagues. Some of his suggestions:

- What do I love doing? What am I best at? What contributions most energize me?
- I notice you're good at ---. How did you get good at that?
- What issues keep coming up in our organization?
- What conversations do we keep having?

- What's frustrating? What do repeated frustrations tell us?
- What's making things hard?
- What's distracting us from doing what's important?
- What have we tried?
- What do we need to stop doing?

[“The Five Faces of Curiosity”](#) by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, August 20, 2021

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9. Recommended Franco-Belgian Comics

In this *School Library Journal* article, Brigid Alverson recommends a number of translated Franco-Belgian comics. She says the combination of humor, fantasy, and slice-of-life stories (with a lot more gender and racial/ethnic diversity than the Tintin, Asterix, and Lucky Luke books of an earlier generation) makes them ideal for American upper-elementary and middle-school students. Her picks:

- *Akissi* by Marguerite Aboutet, illustrated by Mathieu Sapin, grade 2-5
- *The Ballad of Yaya* by Jean-Marie Omont and others, illustrated by Golo Zhao, grade 4-6
- *Bigby Bear* by Philippe Coudray, grade K-6
- *Billy and Buddy* by Jean Roba, grade 4-7
- *Castle in the Stars* by Alex Alice, grade 5-9
- *Catherine's War* by Julia Billet, illustrated by Claire Fauvel, grade 3-7
- *Chef Yasmina and the Potato Panic* by Wauter Mannaert, grade 4-7
- *Chloe* by Greg Tessier, illustrated by Amandine, grade 4-7
- *Cici's Journal: Lost and Found* by Joris Chamblain, illustrated by Aurélie Neyet, grade 3-7
- *The Fly* by Lewis Trondheim, grade 2 and up
- *The Sisters* by Christophe Cazenove, illustrated by William Maury, grade 4-6
- *Where are You Leopold?* by Michel-Yves Schmitt, illustrated by Vincent Caut, grade 3-6
- *The Wolf in Underpants* by Wilfrid Lupano, illustrated by Mayana Itoiz and Paul Cauuet, grade 2-5
- *Young Leonardo* by William Augel, grade 3-7

“Beyond Tintin: Franco-Belgian Comics for American Kids” by Brigid Alverson in *School Library Journal*, August 2021 (Vol. 67, #8, pp. 36-39)

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10. Short Items:

a. Fielding Questions on Critical Race Theory – In this *Leadership 2.0* article, Jay McTighe suggests how to respectfully and effectively respond to three types of constituent questions on what is being taught about racism in the U.S.

[“Receiving Questions About CRT? Consider the Source”](#) by Jay McTighe in *School Leadership 2.0*, August 16, 2021

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b. History videos – These short [streaming videos](#) from Learning for Justice address key concepts in the enslavement of Native Americans and Africans.

“Teaching Hard History: American Slavery, Classroom Videos” from Learning for Justice, August 2021

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c. The Best Young-Adult Books of All Time – *Time Magazine* asked seven authors to decide on the 100 best young-adult books over the years, and here’s their [consensus list](#), with a cover image and short description for each one.

“The 100 Best Young-Adult Books of All Time” chosen by Elizabeth Acevedo, Karen Callender, Jenny Han, Jason Reynolds, Adam Silvera, Angie Thomas, and Nicola Yoon, *Time*, August 23/30, 2021 (Vol. 198, #7-8, pp. 104-110)

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d. Beginning-of-the-Year Surveys – Panorama Education is offering surveys for students, educators, and families that can produce helpful information on perceptions of learning and challenges as the new year begins. They are available (with free registration) at: <https://go.panoramaed.com/learning-recovery-survey-questions>

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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 50 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

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

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
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
Teaching Tolerance
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