Marshall Memo 727

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
March 12, 2018

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"With no collective bargaining rights, no contract, and no legal right to strike, the teachers had managed to mount a statewide work stoppage anyway, and make their demands heard, marshal public support, and stick together until they won. And the rank and file, not union leaders, came to call the shots."

> Jess Bidgood and Campbell Robertson in "Striking Teachers Defied West Virginia, and Their Own Union, Too" in *The New York Times,* March 9, 2018, http://nyti.ms/2FrFsdt

"It has been life changing. Turning off the buzzing breaking-news machine I carry in my pocket was like unshackling myself from a monster who had me on speed dial, always ready to break into my day with half-baked bulletins."

> Farhad Manjoo (see item #4)

"Thou shall commit thy facts of multiplication to memory. Thou shall do unto one side of the equation what thou doest to the other. Thou shall not divide by zero. Thou shall not covet thy neighbor's paper nor anything else they have. Thou shall check all work."

> Excerpts from "The Ten Commandments of Math," a classroom sign in "Those Who Know and Are Known: Students Using Ethnography to Interrogate Language and Literacy Ideologies" by Robert Jean LeBlanc in *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, March/April 2018 (Vol. 61, #5, p. 489-499), http://bit.ly/2FF06GM

"Humans are not born empathetic. Empathy is taught. Parents, caretakers, teachers, and coaches must teach boys empathy by showing them affection, compassion, and understanding. By responding to their needs. By giving them a safe place to express emotions and an ear to discuss them. By nurturing them."

> Abigail Rose Solomon in a letter to *The New York Times*, March 4, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/03/opinion/sunday/boys-men-masculinity.html

"A school library provides a personalized space for all learners – students, faculty, staff, administrators, community members – to seek answers to the questions they face."

> Steven Yates in "Relevance Is Always in Style" in *Knowledge Quest*, March/April 2018 (Vol. 46, #4, p. 4-5), no e-link; Yates can be reached at steven.d.yates@ua.edu.

1. Walking the Talk on Growth Mindset in Mathematics Classrooms

"We live in a society that perpetuates the myth that math ability is an innate gift," says Kathy Liu Sun (Santa Clara University) in this article in *Teaching Children Mathematics*; "some people have it, and others don't." To counter fixed-mindset thinking, many educators make a point of using growth-mindset language – *You can grow your math brain* – and emphasize the importance of hard work, persistence, and learning from mistakes.

But these exhortations are not enough, says Sun: "Decades of research have shown that people's beliefs are shaped through social interaction; experiences shape beliefs and vice versa. When we tell children what to believe, we are placing the onus of having a growth mindset on them without carefully attending to how our instruction and classroom contexts might shape their beliefs."

For example, Sun has observed teachers who use growth-mindset language but unwittingly send fixed-mindset messages in some of these ways:

- When a student answers a question incorrectly, the teacher quickly moves on to another student (the message: we need to protect students from feeling embarrassed when they make a mistake);
- Some students are not given the opportunity to engage in rigorous math tasks (the message: only certain students can grow their math ability);
- Conceptually difficult tasks are given only to students who finish quickly (the message: speediness is a marker of math prowess);
- Several leading questions funnel students' thinking toward the solution (the message: students can't solve challenging problems independently).

How can this happen when the teacher has the best intentions? It's because we all have growth- and fixed-mindsets in our heads, says Sun, and specific classroom situations can trigger instructional actions that undermine our growth-mindset intentions. This happens most frequently when we assess student work, see student mistakes and struggles, and compare students to one another. "When these triggers arise," she says, "we should pause to reframe our response to better align with growth-mindset math instruction." Some general suggestions:

• *Put more emphasis on sense-making and less on procedures*. Focusing on procedures and spending a lot of time on drill and practice conveys a narrow definition of success: it's all about doing the procedure correctly. Procedural accuracy is only a small part of mathematics, and rewarding it distorts the broader curriculum and limits the number of students who can excel – thereby conveying a fixed-mindset message. The alternative is posing questions,

making students' thinking visible, unpacking ideas, making sense of problems, emphasizing conceptual understanding, allowing multiple ways to demonstrate mastery, and saying again and again that there is more to math than procedures and speed.

• *Stop using deficit language*. "We cannot consistently communicate the message that all students can improve," says Sun, "if we continue to label and categorize our math students as 'high versus low' or 'fast versus slow.'" The key is communicating the expectation "that all students can contribute to mathematics learning, not just those who have traditionally been successful." One strategy is *assigning competence* – making a point of recognizing the contribution a student made to a group that includes students at different achievement levels. "Assigning competence is more than praising behavior," Sun explains; "it clearly acknowledges how a student's contribution extends the mathematical thinking. The more we open our eyes to see what all students are capable of accomplishing mathematically, the more they will continue to impress us."

• *Maintain rigor as students struggle and make mistakes*. "We may talk about the importance of failure in our classes," says Sun, "but we can unconsciously counter this message by superficially dealing with a mathematical error by making the math 'easier' for students who are struggling." These actions are well-intentioned, but they water down the curriculum and don't support growth mindset. "Responding to struggle and failure in ways that genuinely support a growth mindset," she continues, "means that we give challenging work, persist alongside students when they make an error, and maintain the intellectual rigor of the task." When students falter, Sun encourages teachers to ask open-ended questions, press for conceptual understanding, unpack misconceptions, explore students' thinking, talk through errors in a nonjudgmental way, and emphasize the role of struggle in growing our mathematical brains. We should also seek out "low-floor, high-ceiling" tasks that maintain intellectual rigor while being accessible to all students. The website https://www.youcubed.org offers math problems along these lines.

"Beyond Rhetoric: Authentically Supporting a Growth Mindset" by Kathy Liu Sun in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, March 2018 (Vol. 24, #5, p. 280-283), available to NCTM members or for purchase at http://bit.ly/2p7ZkMr; Sun can be reached at ksun@scu.edu.

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2. The Powerful Benefits of an Adult Being a High-School Student for a Day

In this article in *Principal Leadership*, editor Michael Levin-Epstein interviews Neil Gupta (Worthington City Schools, Ohio), Jason Markey (East Leyden High School, Illinois), and Devon Young (Stanford University) on the practice of educators tagging along with a student for an entire school day. Some excerpts:

• In Markey's high school, there's a long-standing tradition of having every new teacher shadow a student for a day. It's especially enlightening for newbies to see six or seven different teachers in action and think about how their own teaching style and practices will fit into students' daily school experience. When Markey became an administrator at the school, he asked administrators as well as teachers to participate.

• Markey says shadowing puts educators in the role of an anthropologist looking at their school in ways they can't when they're doing their regular jobs. "I think this has been one of the purest ways to guarantee that you're pushing yourself to have that perspective," he says. "I would challenge people that, if they really want to lead with students in mind first, they need to find ways – and this is one of those avenues – to continue to build empathy for all of the different students in their school and in their district. I think it's a powerful practice that can only benefit their school."

• When he shadows, Markey picks a different type of student each time – perhaps a freshman, an ELL student, a student taking a lot of AP classes. He's also experimented with following a curriculum unit one period a day over a four-week period.

• Shadowing has led Markey and his colleagues to rethink the shape of their school day, how long each class should last, lunch periods, unstructured time, the way teachers configure furniture in their classrooms, and the amount of time students work in groups.

• Gupta says that by spending a full period in each classroom, "you start to really look beyond what you initially see when you're only in there for five minutes, and you really get a sense of what's happening." He's found great value in debriefing with colleagues who've also spent a day shadowing, raising questions like: Is our professional development effective? Are there things we need to do differently? Are there students who need more support, or who have untapped leadership potential?

• In Gupta's school, administrators make a point of checking in with the student they're going to shadow (*Why me? Why are you doing this?*), informing parents, and letting teachers know that when administrators are in their classrooms as part of a shadowing day, they're not wearing their evaluative hat. In one classroom, Gupta surprised the teacher by going up and asking for a hall pass to go to the bathroom.

• Young recommends that shadowers try to debrief with the student they're shadowing at the end of the day, as well as debriefing with their colleagues.

• Gupta and his colleagues tell teachers how much they appreciate their hard work, and share comments like, "I'll tell you, I was tired, my back hurt; it was tough being a kid again." Teachers seem to appreciate administrators (especially those from the central office) taking a full day to experience school from the students' point of view.

• Gupta says that of "all the professional development experiences that I've been to – national conferences, state conferences, workshops – by far [shadowing] has been the best one day of professional development I've had. It's had the most lasting impact for me as an educator to best understand what's going on in my school, how to best help and address those issues happening."

• Young says that shadowing "is a great way to deepen and re-energize connections among colleagues, re-energize people around a common cause, and create a community of people who collaborate, work together, and lead with the student at the center of everything they do. Also, it costs $0 to participate – think of it as a free professional development opportunity where everyone on staff can participate."

"Shadowing Students: Walking a Mile in Students' Shoes Brings Fresh Perspective" by Michael Levin-Epstein, Neil Gupta, Jason Markey, and Devon Young in *Principal Leadership*, March 2018 (Vol. 18, #7, p. 24-30), available at http://bit.ly/2pag0SD for NASSP members

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3. Four Counseling Strategies for Young Adolescents

In this article in *Independent School*, author/consultant Amy Homayoun says that "many of today's students have difficulty identifying what they truly enjoy or giving themselves the freedom to explore new interests, because they are fixated on an external definition of success and achievement." She offers several ways for teachers and counselors to address this challenge:

• *Create opportunities for self-awareness and self-acceptance*. Homayoun suggests asking students questions like:

- What is something new you want to try this semester?
- What skill would you like to improve?
- What is one area where you are really proud of your development over the past year?
- Which personal skills have you developed well?
- What do you love about yourself?
- If there is one new interest you could pursue, what would it be and why?

These don't all have to be solo activities; some may involve collaboration with peers or adults.

• *Clarify values and close the believing-doing gap*. Homayoun often gets an enthusiastic response when she asks adolescents to identify their top 3-5 values from this list: abundance; commitment; compassion; connecting to others; creativity; determination; emotional health; emotional wellness; empathy; care of the environment; family; flexibility; freedom; friendship; fun; humor; integrity; joy; kindness; leadership; loyalty; personal growth; physical health; privacy; recognition; respect; service; spirituality; trust; vitality. Having identified their top values, Homayoun has students reflect on whether their daily habits are moving them closer or further away from their ideals. She believes kids like this exercise because they often feel adults are pushing particular values on them rather than asking them to identify their own.

• *Focus on daily habits and incremental progress*. Many teens are victims of technology overload, dysfunctional multitasking, and sleep deprivation. They need to be guided toward a personalized strategy for dealing with social media, the Internet, and organizing schoolwork and other obligations – with specifics on focusing on one thing at a time, organizing work, and getting enough sleep.

• *Redefine failure*. By middle and high school, many kids are leery of taking healthy risks and trying new things because they're afraid of failing. "The only real failure," says Homayoun, "comes when we don't allow ourselves to explore opportunities that are in line with our values, interests, and personal goals." Sometimes it's wise for a student to "take a B" by trying something that doesn't work out, or make a choice to not excel in one activity in order to fully commit to another – for example, a boy who pushed back on his family's tradition of baseball excellence in order to spend serious time with the basketball team.

• *Bolster resiliency and buoyancy through time-travel reflection*. It's often helpful for a student to look back and ponder progress, new opportunities, and things that could have gone differently, considering questions like:

- What has happened that you are proud of?
- What was something positive that you learned through your experience?
- If something didn't go as planned, what was something you learned that was beneficial for you?

"One Size Does Not Fit All" by Ana Homayoun in *Independent School*, Spring 2018 (Vol. 77, #3, p. 80-84), no e-link available

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4. Get News. Not Too Quickly. Avoid Social.

In this *New York Times* article, Farhad Manjoo reports on his decision to turn off digital news notifications in Twitter, Facebook, and other social media, and get his news solely from the print editions of three newspapers. "Basically, I was trying to slow-jam the news," he says. "It has been life changing. Turning off the buzzing breaking-news machine I carry in my pocket was like unshackling myself from a monster who had me on speed dial, always ready to break into my day with half-baked bulletins."

Manjoo's takeaways from this two-month experiment (which he captured in a Michael Pollan-inspired mantra in the headline above) have direct implications for teaching current events and civics and helping young adolescents improve their online lives:

• Depending on newspapers means reading about major news events as much as a day after they break, but Manjoo says this ends up being less time-consuming for him than following breathless, blow-by-blow accounts throughout the day.

• He believes the news he's been reading in print newspapers has been much more accurate. With the recent Florida school shootings, for example, Manjoo was spared numerous inaccurate and deliberately false accounts that spread like wildfire as events unfolded. "Real life is slow," he says; "it takes professionals time to figure out what happened, and how it fits into context."

• Print news presents the facts first, then opinion. Online, the sequence is reversed. "On social networks," says Manjoo, "every news story comes to you predigested. People don't just post stories – they post their takes on stories, often quoting key parts of a story to underscore how it proves them right, so readers are never required to delve into the story to come up with their own view… It is exactly our fealty to the crowd – to what other people are saying about the news, rather than the news itself – that makes us susceptible to misinformation."

• Getting news online exacerbates the tendency to "burrow into echo chambers," he says, "softening up society for propaganda." We hear what we want to hear, see what we want to see. The government and Facebook won't be able to fix this, especially given how easy it is to spread false information, even in audio and video formats.

• Social media are the most pernicious, Manjoo believes: "The built-in incentives on Twitter and Facebook reward speed over depth, hot takes over facts, and seasoned propagandists over well-meaning analyzers of the news… Just about every problem we battle in understanding the news today – and every one we will battle tomorrow – is exacerbated by plugging into the social-media herd."

• Manjoo says that since he disconnected, he's felt less anxious and less addicted to the news, as if time has slowed down, and yet he's more fully and widely informed. "Sure, there's still a lot of news," he says, "but when you read it once a day, the world feels contained and comprehensible rather than a blur of headlines lost on a phone's lock screen."

• Perhaps most important, he's found more time to read books and poetry and become a more attentive husband and father.

To get all these benefits, Manjoo acknowledges, you don't need to pay for print newspapers, which are expensive. There are thoughtful online news sources, such as morning newsletters like those from Axios or daily news podcasts. "What's important," he concludes, "is choosing a medium that highlights deep stories over quickly breaking news." And, of course, turning off online notifications and not getting news from social media: "They distract and feed into a constant sense of fragmentary paranoia about the world. They are also unnecessary. If something really big happens, you will find out."

"Yesterday's News Today: Deep, Informed, Accurate, and Inky" by Farhad Manjoo in *The New York Times*, March 8, 2018, no e-link available; Manjoo can be reached at farhad.manjoo@nytimes.com.

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5. Should the Voting Age Be Lowered to 16?

In this *New York Times* article, Laurence Steinberg (Temple University) says that high-school students eloquently speaking out on gun safety in the aftermath of the Florida school shootings "are challenging the tiresome stereotype of American kids as indolent narcissists whose brains have been addled by smartphones." But what about the suggestion that 16- and 17-year-olds be given the vote so they can have a say in school-safety issues that so directly affect them? Are younger adolescents' brains well-enough developed to make good judgments in the voting booth? Kids in that age bracket have been known to be impulsive and hotheaded.

It's not that simple, stays Steinberg. Psychologists distinguish between what they call "hot" and "cold" cognition:

- Hot cognition is when people are emotionally aroused, in groups, or in a hurry. "If you are making decisions when angry or exhausted," says Steinberg, "the most critical skill is self-regulation, which enables you to control your emotions, withstand pressure from others, resist temptation, and check your impulses."
- Cold cognition is the kind of thinking people do when they're in a calm situation and have time to use facts to reason logically.

"Studies of cold cognition have shown that the skills necessary to make informed decisions are firmly in place by 16," says Steinberg. "By this age, adolescents can gather and process

information, weigh pros and cons, reason logically with facts, and take time before making a decision. Teenagers may sometimes make bad choices, but statistically speaking, they do not make them any more often than adults do." Voting is clearly a cold-cognition activity.

The ability to act reasonably in emotionally fraught situations, on the other hand, doesn't mature until the early 20s. This suggests an older age for activities like driving with peers, smoking, drinking, and viewing violent or sexually explicit movies.

"In addition to the scientific case for lowering the voting age," Steinberg continues, "there is also a civic argument. Consider the dozen or so countries like Argentina, Austria, Brazil, and Nicaragua that allow people to vote at 16 in national, state, and local elections. In these countries, voting turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds is significantly higher than it is among older young adults." Establishing the habit of voting at a young age tends to carry over when people are older, improving civic participation across the board. This could be significant in the U.S., which has one of the lowest rates of voter turnout of any developed nation.

"Lower the Voting Age to 16" by Laurence Steinberg in *The New York Times*, March 4, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/02/opinion/sunday/voting-age-school-shootings.html; Steinberg can be reached at lds@temple.edu.

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6. Weekly Just-in-Time Help for Struggling High-School Students

In this *Principal Leadership* article, Minnesota school leaders Robb Virgin and Jeffrey Erickson describe how their 3,300-student high school addressed the challenge of supporting students who are showing early signs of failure. Teachers were willing to help struggling students before and after school, but buses arrived ten minutes before first period, and there were other reasons afternoons didn't work for many students. Time had to be found within the school day.

The solution: Every Wednesday, the school shaved six minutes from each 56-minute class and inserted an extra period (dubbed MAST – Minnetonka Academic Success Time) from 8:00-8:40 a.m. Students who are showing signs of failure (about 600 a week) are asked to report to teachers for small-group or individual help. Teachers almost always invite students face to face; for example, "I would like to see you Wednesday for MAST to work on your Civil War document-based question. I have a couple of suggestions, and with some focused time, I think your essay could really improve." Administrators suggest that teachers invite up to seven students, for remediation or as general preparation for upcoming assignments.

Over the last few years, the school has fine-tuned its scheduling approach for MAST. "The goal of the entire system," say Virgin and Erickson, "is to get students with the highest need of support in front of the teachers who can best help them." Teachers invite students on Monday, and on Tuesday counselors and case managers review assignments, looking especially at the approximately 120 students who have received invitations to more than one class. The team chooses the highest priority session for each student and works on a broader plan for these high-risk cases. Teachers are notified which students to expect, and have an opportunity to push back if they think a student who's been assigned elsewhere should be with

them. Teachers, students, and parents get an e-mail notification of assignments by the end of school Tuesday. During the Wednesday MAST period, administrators, counselors, and support staff move around the building making sure students get to their sessions. Every Thursday, data on absences are collected and analyzed with an eye to the overall strategy for high-risk students, not for disciplinary consequences. A survey of students found that 95 percent said MAST was helpful.

What happens to the other 2,700 students during the MAST period? They can choose from other support programs, including coaching in writing and math, peer tutoring, the testing center, or collaboration with peers. To accommodate this unstructured period, the school completely redesigned its media center and removed 800 lockers to create student work environments. The weekly MAST time, say Virgin and Erickson, "serves as an important midweek pause for students to receive targeted support, utilize other resources or spaces, or in many cases (particularly for upperclassmen), get a few extra minutes of rest. The incentive of 'time' is compelling to our students."

MAST has had a significant impact, especially on the neediest students. Compared to the last semester before full implementation of the Wednesday sessions, the school has seen a:

- 45 percent drop in total failing grades earned;
- 33 percent drop in the number of students earning a failing grade;
- 25 percent drop in students with multiple failing grades.

With failing grades significantly reduced, teachers and other support staff have been able to address D grades and other indicators of underperformance.

"Implementing Individualized Intervention to the Max" by Robb Virgin and Jeffrey Erickson in *Principal Leadership*, March 2018 (Vol. 18, #7, p. 38-42), no e-link available

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7. Helping All Students Find "Affinity Spaces" That Promote Growth

"The Internet can be a minefield of misinformation, misbehavior, divisiveness, and risk," says James Paul Gee (Arizona State University) in this article in *Phi Delta Kappan*, "but it is also the scene of an extraordinary revolution in out-of-school teaching and learning. Increasingly, young people's most powerful learning opportunities can be found online, in experiences and environments created by people working outside the K-12 school system and featuring educational practices rarely seen in traditional schools." Gee is especially interested in the role of *affinity spaces* – "loosely organized social and cultural settings in which the work of teaching tends to be shared by many people, in many locations, who are connected by a shared interest or passion."

Of course affinity spaces have existed throughout human history, well before the Internet. Gee mentions his own upbringing in a devout Catholic family surrounded by other like-minded families, a church, a parochial school, a Catholic university, religious events, and Catholic TV. All these helped members deal with everyday dilemmas like how to act morally and how to explain why bad things happen to good people.

However, says Gee, digital media "are radically transforming the ways such affinity spaces function… Today, one can find affinity groups devoted to everything from citizen science to improving women's health, passing legislation, curing rare diseases, writing fan fiction, and countless other topics, including many interests that are school-like (such as affinity spaces focused on tech skills, history, and mythology). And within these affinity spaces, people are fully engaged in helping each other to learn, act, and produce, regardless of their age, place of origin, formal credentials, or level of expertise."

Gee's research has zeroed in on one particular affinity space: video gamers. He believes it has especially important lessons for K-12 education, "suggesting how we might better organize our work around students' interests and passions." He's not recommending using video games in schools; rather, he's interested in two components of the video-game affinity space that are instructive for K-12 educators. First, a good video game is a well-designed educational environment, giving players interesting and challenging problems to solve, varied opportunities to learn, and just-in-time instruction and mentoring. Second, video gamers are part of an extended community of kindred spirits, including gamers near and far, stores where gamers gather, gamer conventions, gamer clubs, and more.

This is just one affinity space; many others are available to young people. But there's a distinct socioeconomic divide in who takes part in this diverse, worldwide web of communities: lower-income youth have much less access, and that is hugely consequential. "Increasingly," says Gee, "it is by joining and exploring such spaces that young people pursue their interests and passions, define who they want to be, and develop important knowledge and skills. Those who spend all their learning time in the classroom, without also having chances to roam among the myriad virtual sites and their related locales, will be massively disadvantaged."

That's why, Gee concludes, public school educators "must begin to see it as part of their job not just to provide classroom instruction but also to help their students find, create, and join their own affinity spaces. Today, teachers must learn to curate the spaces available on the Internet and help students find ones that will serve their needs."

"Affinity Spaces: How Young People Live and Learn Online and Out of School" by James Paul Gee in *Phi Delta Kappan*, March 2018 (Vol. 99, #6, p. 8-13), www.kappanmagazine.org; Gee can be reached at james.gee@asu.edu.

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
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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
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Essential Teacher
Exceptional Children
Go Teach
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
Literacy Today
Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Education Gadfly
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 Magazine