Marshall Memo 622

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 1, 2016

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"No child is destined to become a gang member."
Sara Truebridge (see item #2)

"If you're hiding from an abusive relative or you just don't want your classmates to know how overwhelmed you feel about applying to college, a text message, even one sent in public, is safer than a phone call. What's more, tears go undetected by the person you've reached out to, and you don't have to hear yourself say aloud your most shameful secrets."
Alice Gregory (see item #1)

"When blended learning becomes synonymous with separating students into cubbies equipped with headphones and customized digital playlists for a large percentage of each school day, we risk losing sight of the human elements that make learning a truly personal endeavor."
Julie Coiro (see item #4)

"A good exit ticket can tell whether students have a superficial or in-depth understanding of the material. Teachers can then use this data for adapting instruction to meet students' needs the very next day."
Hampton High School, Pennsylvania educators (see item #6)

"In some affluent communities, we have a community-service Olympics going on, to see who can get the most impressive community-service experience, and it's become another accomplishment, another way of padding your résumé. At the same time, there are large numbers of students who don't have opportunities to do community service."
Richard Weissbourd (see item #3)

"How do we help our kids manage this madness, and how do we raise good kids?"
Rod Skinner, college counselor in a Massachusetts high school (*ibid.*)

1. Why Texting Is the Ideal Medium for Teen Crisis Counseling

The average American adolescent sends almost 2,000 text messages a month, reports Alice Gregory in this article in *The New Yorker*. For teens, texting is their default form of electronic communication. The text "is unparalleled in its ability to relay information concisely," says Gregory. "The act of writing, even if the product consists of only a hundred and forty characters composed with one's thumbs, forces a kind of real-time distillation of emotional chaos." Researchers have confirmed the efficacy of writing as a therapeutic intervention. Tapping out a text message isn't the same as keeping a diary, says Gregory, but "it can act as a behavioral buffer, providing distance between a person and intense, immediate, and often impulsive feelings."

A striking statistic is that more than ninety-eight percent of text messages are opened – that's four times the frequency for e-mails. For a distressed teen, this is extremely important, which is why texting is the medium used by Crisis Text Line, a teen counseling service that receives an average of 15,000 texts a day and gets back to senders within five minutes. An average exchange takes a little more than an hour, longer if there's a risk of suicide.

Gregory took the full 24-hour, seven-week training course to be a Crisis Text Line counselor and was drilled on all the key skills. Probe gently for more information – "I'm so sorry to hear that. Can you tell me a little more about what your so-called boyfriend is shouting?" In response to a vague text, "Life sucks. I'm freaking out," texting back, "So what's going on tonight?" She was trained to avoid jumping into problem-solving mode, instead using validation ("What a tough situation" "You must be devastated"). Probes were important to get more information ("Do you mind if I ask you…"), and she was trained to highlight strengths ("You're a great brother for being so worried about him"). Showing empathy was important ("It sounds like you're feeling anxious because of all these rumors"), and so was not sounding like a robot. The trainer stressed the importance of avoiding teen patois and not making typos, which undermine authoritativeness. "There is something humbling about Crisis Text Line, and, indeed, about help lines in general," says Gregory. "A person in pain will say what she wants to say, and it probably doesn't matter much who does the asking."

Many incoming texts are not an emergency – just a teen who wants someone to listen to their concerns about grades or a relationship – but some texts require immediate intervention – an abusive boyfriend, a father molesting his daughter, a suicidal teen. In these situations, counselors ask if the teen is alone, if their door is locked, if they have a trusted person they can contact, and they get enough information to contact the local police.

The advantage of using texting for a crisis hotline is that teens who are willfully uncommunicative when speaking are often forthcoming to the point of garrulous when texting, quite willing to disclose sensitive information. "On the phone, you have to ask a few more questions, sort of explore a little bit more to find out what's really going on," says Jen James, a Crisis Text Line counselor in Michigan. "With the text line, they are pretty open. They just come out and tell you and want to talk about it." This seems counterintuitive, says Gregory: "Texts are a written record, after all, and what if the wrong person saw them? But in practical terms, text messaging affords a level of privacy that the human voice makes impossible. If you're hiding from an abusive relative or you just don't want your classmates to know how overwhelmed you feel about applying to college, a text message, even one sent in public, is safer than a phone call. What's more, tears go undetected by the person you've reached out to, and you don't have to hear yourself say aloud your most shameful secrets."

The C.E.O. of Crisis Text Line is Nancy Lublin, and she puts a premium on making sense of the data about the texts they receive. Based on five million texts so far, the organization's data crunchers know that depression peaks at 8:00 p.m., anxiety at 11:00 p.m., self-harm at 4:00 a.m., and substance abuse at 5:00 a.m. A texter who uses the word "Mormon" tends to be reaching out about LGBTQ issues. Arkansas ranks highest for eating disorders, Vermont for depression, and Montana for suicidal thoughts (with New Hampshire lowest in that category).

"You cannot have accountable care – financially or morally accountable care – if you cannot count," says Isaac Kohane, a pediatrician at Harvard Medical School, "and until recently we literally could not count with any degree of acceptable accuracy. It's been mind-boggling, to those of us who know what was available, that Amazon and Netflix were creating a far more customized, data-driven, evidence-based experience for their customers than medicine has." Lublin hopes the data that Crisis Text Line is generating will eventually be helpful to schools and police departments in reaching out and preventing a wide range of teen crises.

"R U There? A New Counseling Service Harnesses the Power of the Text Message" by Alice Gregory in *The New Yorker*, February 9, 2015, http://bit.ly/1QVqE8S

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2. Three Key Factors That Nurture Student Resilience

In this article in *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, California consultant/researcher Sara Truebridge addresses the central question about resilience: *Why do some children who are exposed to high-risk environments successfully adapt while others do not?* Truebridge challenges the notion that resilience is a trait that students either have or don't have. All people have the capacity for resilience, she says, and there are three factors that tap and nurture that potential: (a) caring relationships, (b) high expectations, and (c) meaningful opportunities for participation and contribution. The three factors help develop children's social competence,

problem-solving ability, sense of self and internal locus of control, and sense of purpose and optimism about the future – all of which are key to dealing successfully with adversity.

"When these protective factors exist together in any one environment – home, school, community, or peer group – the climate in that environment becomes one that is optimal for nurturing the resilience of a child, youth, or any individual," says Truebridge. "Applying these approaches does not cost extra money, but rather requires a focus on re-culturing schools in a unified vision to create, nurture, and sustain important protective factors that provide a positive influence and buffer students from adversity, threat, stress, and risk." Having all three factors present in a school can compensate for their absence in the family, community, or peer group. And a school with these factors can be resilient as an organization in the face of challenges and traumatic events it may face.

What do the three key factors look like in schools? Truebridge lists these specific actions and characteristics:

• *Caring relationships* – This is all about providing a sense of connectedness and belonging, "being there," showing compassion and trust. Teachers get to know the life context of each student and model empathy and compassion. Principals engage students, staff, and parents in school climate surveys and have an open-door policy that makes students comfortable dropping in if they need help or just want to talk. Superintendents make regular visits to schools and sponsor "dialogue nights" where adults and youth can talk together in an atmosphere of mutual trust and safety.

• *High expectations* – Teachers make appropriate expectations clear and recognize progress as well as performance. They also encourage mindfulness and self-awareness of moods, thinking, and actions. Principals orchestrate a curriculum that is challenging, comprehensive, thematic, experiential, and inclusive of multiple perspectives. They also provide training in resilience and youth development, and work to change deeply held adult beliefs about students' capacities. Superintendents question how success is defined and ensure a commitment to being culturally responsive.

• *Meaningful opportunities for participation and contribution* – Teachers hold daily class meetings and empower students to create classroom norms and agreements. Principals establish peer-helping/tutoring and cross-age mentoring/tutoring programs and set up peer support networks to help new students and families acclimate to the school environment. Superintendents scour the neighborhood to identify pro-youth resources, services, and facilities, and hire a community liaison officer to enhance communication, cooperation, and understanding.

Truebridge draws on her own research and that of several other researchers to make these observations about resilience in schools:

- Resilience is a process, not a trait. It's a struggle to define oneself as healthy amidst serious challenges.
- All people have the capacity for resilience; for some it needs to be tapped.
- Several personal strengths are associated with resilience – being strong cognitively, socially, emotionally, morally, and spiritually.

- One person – a teacher, relative, friend – can make a difference in the life outcomes of an embattled student.
- Educators' beliefs about students' resilience are key factors in student outcomes. "If you don't believe in the capacity of all individuals to have resilience," says Truebridge, "then you run the risk of giving up on them."
- Teachers and administrators who have a "growth" mindset about students' ability to overcome adversity will get far better results than those with a "fixed" mindset.
- In classrooms, open channels of communication are essential. Nothing should inhibit, embarrass, or shame students from asking questions during a lesson.
- Coming from a high-risk environment does not determine a person's life trajectory. "No child is destined to become a gang member," says Truebridge.
- Most individuals exposed to adversity – between 50 and 70 percent – do meet developmental milestones and lead productive and independent lives.
- Bad behavior doesn't equate to being a bad person. "What the student did was display poor judgment and, as a result, the student needs to be responsible for those actions," says Truebridge. "However, a person who displays bad judgment is not 'forever' a bad person."
- To help others, educators need to take care of themselves. An analogy: on an airplane, people need to have their own oxygen masks in place before they can help others.
- Challenging life experiences and events are opportunities for growth, development, and change. "Quite often," says Truebridge, "our perseverance through tough times builds our confidence and makes us stronger."

"Resilience: It Begins With Beliefs" by Sara Truebridge in *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, January-March, 2016 (Vol. 52, #1, p. 22-27), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/1nArKuR; Truebridge can be reached at resilienceST@gmail.com.

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3. More on Emphasizing Altruism in the College Admissions Process

In this article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Eric Hoover reports on the trend among college admissions officers to put more emphasis on meaningful community service versus students submitting long lists of AP courses and extracurricular activities. The "Turning the Tide" campaign [see item #2 in Marshall Memo 621] issued a manifesto earlier this year saying, "The admissions process can counteract a narrow focus on personal success and promote in young people a greater appreciation of others and the common good."

Rod Skinner, director of college counseling at Milton Academy in Massachusetts, welcomes the shift. "There's a real developmental opportunity in this process, if it's done right," he says. "How do we help our kids manage this madness, and how do we raise good kids?" Richard Weissbourd, author of the "Turning the Tide" paper, says, "The issue here is getting over yourself… College admissions, for many kids, is the only sort of rite of passage in adolescence where they are in conversations with adults, about what colleges value, what society values. It just seems like a potential opportunity, a leverage point." The Massachusetts

Institute of Technology's admissions office was inspired to add a mandatory essay prompt: "At MIT, we seek to develop in each member of our community the ability and passion to work collaboratively for the betterment of humankind. How have you improved the lives of others in your community?"

Weissbourd and others are concerned about a social-class divide in the admissions process. "In some affluent communities," he says, "we have a community-service Olympics going on, to see who can get the most impressive community-service experience, and it's become another accomplishment, another way of padding your résumé. At the same time, there are large numbers of students who don't have opportunities to do community service." For some students, parents' pressure to get them into elite college is a major factor. "If they don't get over their obsession with a handful of colleges," says Weissbourd, "this process is going to be really hard to change."

There's been push-back on the "Turning the Tide" report, and some colleges have declined to endorse it. "This manifesto is too broad, too general, and frankly too critical, and in a way [that] assumes the worst about young people," says Richard Shaw, the dean of undergraduate admissions and financial aid at Stanford University (which didn't support the report). Gregory Roberts, dean of admissions at the University of Virginia, which did endorse "Turning the Tide," still has concerns: "Frankly, the students I see are accepting of others and interested in making the world a better place."

Other skeptics wonder how deeply the admissions process should peer into the hearts of 17-year-olds. Is it appropriate to ask whether a student is "kind, generous, honest, fair, and attuned to those who are struggling in their daily lives"? And some have pointed out that the report applies mostly to a small percent of students, and what colleges say they value may be a challenge to game the system. "Smart, rich kids are always going to figure out a way to look the way colleges want them to look," says Willard Dix, an independent college counselor in Chicago, of the admissions process. "It's a moment of extreme self-consciousness, and you're trying to put yourself in the best possible light."

"Wanted: Students of High Character" by Eric Hoover in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 29, 2016 (Vol. LXII, #20, p. A8), no free e-link available

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4. Finding the Right Balance of Talk, Student Voice, and Technology

In this article in *Literacy Today*, Julie Coiro (University of Rhode Island) takes note of a large international study by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development), which found that computers were having no significant impact on students' proficiency in reading, math, and science. In many countries, the study found, frequent use of computers actually made students' performance worse. "Although these findings may relate to differences in professional development or implementation," says Coiro, "it was clear that drill-and-practice software had a negative effect on student performance."

Coiro draws a distinction between *personalized* and *personal* approaches to teaching and learning:

Personalized:

- Experiences are customized for each student but controlled by the teacher or program.
- Students work individually on computers.
- They move through personalized playlists independently and at their own pace.
- Students have little choice in selecting the activities or how they demonstrate mastery.
- Students have few opportunities to construct ideas or collaborate with others.

Personal:

- Students initiate and control the learning process.
- Learning experiences often emerge from actively engaging and talking with others about personal wonderings.
- These wonderings are often sparked by a topic or problem encountered in school, at home, or in the community.
- Students have opportunities to generate questions and create products that connect their own interests to real-life concerns.
- Technology is not critical for learning to be personal; all that's needed is space and time to actively reflect, collaborate, and engage with personally meaningful ideas.
- Once students are empowered to direct their own learning pathways, technology can open the door to a range of texts, tools, and people to explore and connect ideas.

"What worries me," says Coiro, "is that, in some circles, personalized learning increasingly has come to represent a narrow strategy of computer-based instruction with limited opportunities for human interaction and personal ownership of the learning process. When blended learning becomes synonymous with separating students into cubbies equipped with headphones and customized digital playlists for a large percentage of each school day, we risk losing sight of the human elements that make learning a truly personal endeavor."

Coiro believes that when blended learning is implemented in a balanced way, "teachers and students use a range of human and digital resources to improve their ability to think, problem solve, collaborate, and communicate. A delicate balance of talk and technology use keeps us all grounded in conversations with other people about what really matters." Coiro has four suggestions for striking this balance:

• *Build a culture of personal inquiry*. Students have regular opportunities to pursue topics relevant to them, using a range of texts, tools, and people (offline and online) to get emotionally engaged.

• *Expect learners to talk*. Students engage in literacy experiences involving face-to-face and online collaboration, conversations, arguments, negotiations, and presentations.

• *Encourage digital creation*. Students create original products that share new knowledge and connect insights from school, home, and the community.

• *Make space for students to participate and matter*. "Through participation, individuals assert their autonomy and ownership of learning," says Coiro. "In turn, their inquiry becomes more personal and engaging."

"Let's Get Personal: Balancing Talk with Technology to Truly Personalize Learning" by Julie

Coiro in *Literacy Today*, January/February 2016 (Vol. 33, #4, p. 6-7), no free e-link available; Coiro can be reached at jcoiro@uri.edu.

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5. Squelching Shame in Reading Classes

In this *Literacy Today* article, Justin Stygles, a sixth-grade teacher and literacy specialist in Maine, bemoans the fact that some students become ashamed of their inability to read well. "Unlike participation in sports," says Stygles, "the choice to abandon reading to pursue other talents is not an option. Kids really have no escape from the struggles they face during the learning-to-read process, especially in light of frequent assessment or graduation through levels." The message comes through loud and clear: *If you don't learn to read, you'll be a failure*. "Shamed readers do not believe they improve or can improve," says Stygles.

He believes three principles can refocus the interaction of reading, teacher, and instruction and reduce shame in reading classrooms:

• *Compassion* – Testing and leveling early in the school year can remind some students of what they can't do. "Measurement must be replaced by early and frequent positive transactions between reading, teacher, and texts," says Stygles. In his own classroom, he devotes the opening weeks of school to getting to know the reading lives of each student and launching them into successful experiences with well-chosen texts.

• *Authenticity* – "Not all of us love reading," says Stygles. "Our kids need to know *our* struggles, *our* withdrawals and reluctance. Students should know, from our childhoods to our present reading states, if *we* disliked books, felt inferior to peers, or felt unacknowledged by people from whom we wanted to gain affirmation… We should share with students what intimidates us about reading, how we find time, and how we focus… If we show our readers realities of reading, maturing students will see reading as less burdensome." Struggling students especially need to be able to deal with the intimidation factor of classmates who are voracious, effortless readers.

• *Resiliency* – Students need to get past dreary minimum requirements (eight books a year) and understand the commitment involved in becoming a good reader. "What students can learn," says Stygles, "is how to manage their time, select books reasonably, and justify their reading choices. When students understand their capacity – what they can do successfully – they not only protect themselves from shameful failure, but also become stronger readers through repeated experiences of success and pleasure."

"Eliminating Shame in Reading Instruction: Three Simple Principles to Change Struggling Readers' Perceptions" by Justin Stygles in *Literacy Today*, January/February 2016 (Vol. 33, #4, p. 10-11), no free e-link available; Stygles is at justin.vocabularyteacher@yahoo.com. .

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6. Effective Use of Exit Tickets

In this *Edutopia* article, educators at Hampton High School in Pennsylvania describe how they use exit tickets to assess student understanding at the end of lessons and follow up

with differentiated help. "A good exit ticket can tell whether students have a superficial or in-depth understanding of the material," they write. "Teachers can then use this data for adapting instruction to meet students' needs the very next day… Exit tickets allow teachers to see where the gaps in knowledge are, what they need to fix, what students have mastered, and what can be enriched in the classroom… Perhaps one group will get more direct instruction around the basic concept, while another group will work independently. Perhaps only one or two students need some additional help, and you'll plan accordingly. The key to differentiation is that you have high expectations for all students and a clear objective. If you know what you want students to master, differentiation allows you to use different strategies to help all students get there."

In terms of length, 3-5 short questions make a good exit ticket, say the authors. They recommend multiple-choice or short-answer questions linked to the lesson objective and focused on key skills or concepts that students should have grasped. Students should be able to complete the exit ticket in a few minutes at the end of a class period. Exit tickets can be pencil-and-paper, but technology makes collection and analysis quicker and easier – Poll Everywhere, Google Forms, clickers, and other apps.

The authors advise against questions that are too general (*Do you understand?*) and questions that can be answered *Yes* or *No*. They provide these examples of effective questions:

- Name one important thing you learned in class today.
- What did you think was accomplished by the small-group activity we did today?
- Write one question about today's content – something that has left you puzzled.
- Today's lesson had three objectives. Which of the three do you think was most successfully reached? Explain. Which was not attained? Why do you think it wasn't?
- Read this problem and tell me what your first step would be in solving it.
- One of the goals of this class is to have all participants contribute to the seminar. How well do you think this was achieved today?
- Do you have any suggestions for how today's class could have been improved?
- I used the blackboard extensively today. Was its organization and content helpful to you in learning? Why or why not?
- Which of the readings you did for class today was most helpful in preparing you for the lesson? Why?
- We did a concept map activity in class today. Was this a useful learning activity for you? Why or why not?

"Exit Tickets: Checking for Understanding" by teachers at Hampton High School, Allison Park, Pennsylvania in *Edutopia*, June 23, 2015, http://edut.to/23FtBj3

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7. Digital Tools to Support Effective Literacy Teaching

In this *Literacy Today* article, Detra Price-Dennis and Sarah Schlessinger (Teachers College, Columbia University) recommend digital tools that enhance teaching and learning in three key areas:

• *Collaborative learning* – These tools help students learn with and from each other and enhance conceptual learning, creative problem-solving, and classroom community:

- Google Docs – Students work simultaneously on one document from different devices and comment on shared documents.
- Padlet – Students work simultaneously on a shared digital "corkboard" from different devices, adding images, videos, text, PDFs, links, and audio messages.
- Coggle – Multiple students use this concept mapping tool to edit content simultaneously from different devices.
- VoiceThread – Students work independently or with a team to add images, videos, text, and their own audio, video, and typed or drawn annotations to a presentation-like format.

Each of these tools allows students to contribute individually to shared creations involving inquiry, peer feedback, and collaborative composition.

• *Universal design and multimodal representations* – These tools allow teachers to share information in interactive ways and get students producing their own narratives:

- Glogster – A platform that allows students to create digital posters including text, video, audio, photos, animations, and voice.
- iMovie – Voice-editing software that lets students create their own movies or book trailers.
- Storybird – A story-writing site that gives students access to professional illustrations.
- Educreations and ShowMe – Digital whiteboards that allow students to record as they draw and narrate image or video on a topic of their choice

• *Accessibility* – These tools support students who need accommodations and modifications to participate fully in the classroom:

- Read&Write – Tools for text-to-speech, speech-to-text, smart predictive text, highlighting organization, vocabulary support, translation, and voice commenting.
- NewsELA – Current-events articles, each written at five different Lexile levels.
- Readability – This app simplifies the screen by removing all distracting ads and images.
- Blendspace and Nearpod – These multimodal platforms allow teachers to input content and activities for students to work through as they view and respond to questions for each segment.

Price-Dennis and Schlessinger stress that the teacher plays a key role in getting the most from each of these tools.

"Digital Tools for Inclusivity: Our Top Recommendations for Reaching All Learners" by Detra Price-Dennis and Sarah Schlessinger in *Literacy Today*, January/February 2016 (Vol. 33, #4, p. 30-31), no free e-link available; the authors are at detra.price-dennis@tc.columbia.edu and sls2188@tc.columbia.edu.

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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

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

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 64 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year).

Subscriptions:

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

Website:

If you go to http://www.marshallmemo.com you will find detailed information on:

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Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

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- All back issues (also in Word and PDF)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- A collection of "classic" articles from all 11 years

Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

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