Marshall Memo 981

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
April 10, 2023

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"It's scary to walk in someone else's shoes. But you can imagine it if you're taught about it. There's a need for truth telling and widening perspectives."

Margo Stern Strom, founder of the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum, who died on March 28th at 81; more in this *New York Times* obituary

"Our role casts us as *authorities* in our content areas, but we must be careful not to appear too *authoritative*, lest it discourage critical thinking and individual agency on the part of our students."

Kelsey Maki (see item #2)

"Schools are the only institution that can, on a large scale, cultivate in young people the sensibilities and skills to engage constructively with those with opposing ideologies – to view them not as stock characters or villains, but as complex individuals – and seek common ground."

Richard Weissbourd, Glenn Manning, and Eric Torres (see item #3)

"Without good sex health education, it's less likely that people end up in healthy relationships. Unless we normalize talking about bodies and romantic relationships, I don't know how we expect people to sort of magically have those conversations within the context of a healthy relationship."

Elizabeth Heubeck in "'Don't Say Period' Bill Is Latest Example of States' Efforts to Limit Sex Education" in *Education Week*, April 5, 2023; see also this article.

"The goal of home visiting is to learn from families, not to teach families."

Judy Paulick, Amanda Kibler, and Natalia Palacios (see item #1)

"Calling on an infinitely patient, zero-cost tutor to guide me through new subjects feels like a superpower. Used properly, they can be amazing teaching tools."

Kevin Roose on ChatGPT and other large language models (see item #8)

Listening. Writing. Sleeping.

Three student behaviors that a AI facial recognition algorithm in China can ascertain

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1. Making Relationship-Building, Asset-Framed Home Visits

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Judy Paulick and Natalia Palacios (University of Virginia) and Amanda Kibler (Oregon State University) say that when educators think about family literacy practices, what comes to mind is parents reading picture books at bedtime and children "playing school" – in other words, families engaging in school-related activities at home.

In fact, say the authors, family literacy activities are much broader, including: writing grocery lists, clipping coupons, following recipes, keeping a family calendar, planning celebrations and get-togethers, writing notes and letters, sharing postcards, telling stories, texting and using social media, teaching children cultural traditions, sharing religious texts, playing video games, following multi-step directions to assemble a piece of furniture, using maps and atlases, playing board games, gardening, completing forms, and more.

Because of all these experiences, say Paulick, Palacios, and Kibler, "most children come to school with rich and varied repertoires of literacy experiences." But if educators look only for school-like literacy practices in their students' homes, they might frame what families are (or aren't) doing through a deficit lens, missing "a wealth of family literacy assets that could enrich classrooms and make teaching and learning more relevant to children" – especially those from marginalized groups. This article focuses on Hispanic families and some of the cultural differences in children's home experiences.

The authors believe one of the best ways for teachers to appreciate families' varied literacy assets is making home visits – with a particular orientation. "We want to be clear," they say: "the goal of home visiting is to learn from families, not to teach families. Traditional home visiting programs and family literacy nights tend to have the opposite goal – to assimilate families into the norms of school-based practice. On the contrary, we are suggesting that teachers learn from families and shift their school-based practices as a result."

Meeting families on their home turf is new to many teachers, say Paulick, Palacios, and Kibler: "Similar to implementing new academic curricula, home visiting requires deep self-

reflection to ensure we meet the objectives and enact the strategies well. This work begins with acknowledging, understanding, and being committed to deconstructing our own biases." One unhelpful belief may be that some families are not interested in supporting their children's reading at home. The authors say that in many Hispanic families, there is less emphasis on teaching phonics and reading to children (the belief is that those should be handled by the school) and more on teaching cooperation with peers and respect for adults. Not understanding this cultural difference may prevent educators from seeing and appreciating the other ways that families are building children's literacy knowledge and skills.

There may also be a language barrier, which makes an interpreter or the use of translating software essential. And it's possible that teachers may commit a cultural faux pas – for example, not taking off their shoes in a household where this is the norm. Humility and apologies are important, and families are usually understanding and forgiving. The authors caution teachers not to prejudge families based on children's school work and test scores. "Rather," they say, "teachers can recognize that standardized tests and other measures are limited, and family literacy is substantially broader."

Teachers can use what they learn in home visits to continue, enhance, or initiate classroom activities that bring families and classrooms closer together, including:

- Choosing texts for read-alouds and classroom libraries that represent, honor, and normalize the literacy practices students see in their homes.
- Inviting families to share their skills and knowledge in class – for example, with a science or social studies unit;
- Creating class books that showcase family recipes, stories, or important artifacts;
- Having students create bilingual texts for others in the school – written, oral, or multimedia;
- Creating opportunities for students to read with reading buddies within or across classrooms;
- Collaborating with families to effect positive change in the community.

"When homes and schools honor each other," conclude the authors, "there is more continuity for children across their day. By engaging in practices that are culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining, teachers create that continuity for all their students, not just students from dominant cultures… It allows *all* children to feel 'at home' in their classrooms, not just the children whose home cultures are aligned with the dominant culture and school-based norms… This continuity extends to parents as well: when families feel safe and welcomed in classrooms and schools, they become more involved; that involvement is associated with better outcomes for children."

"Understanding Literacies in Latinx Families: Teachers Using Home Visits to Reimagine Classroom Practices" by Judy Paulick, Amanda Kibler, and Natalia Palacios in *The Reading Teacher*, March/April 2023 (Vol. 76, #5, pp. 578-585); the authors can be reached at jhp7h@virginia.edu, amanda.kibler@oregonstate.edu, and nap5s@virginia.edu.

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2. Information Literacy: What Sources Can Teachers and Students Trust?

In this article in *NJEA Review*, Kelsey Maki (Brookdale Community College) begins with four propositions:

- Throughout history, reasonable people have disagreed on how to solve problems.
- Disagreements push people to construct persuasive arguments based on shared facts.
- Political polarization has become so extreme that people no longer agree on basic facts.
- Educators' work is exceedingly difficult in a polarized, post-truth environment.

A further challenge, says Maki, is that many people believe they're good at judging the validity and reliability of information when in fact they aren't, and this leads them to naively spread misinformation.

"In such divisive times," Maki continues, "it seems sensible to start from a position of humility and apply elements of a 'growth mindset' to our teaching practice… Our role casts us as *authorities* in our content areas, but we must be careful not to appear too *authoritative*, lest it discourage critical thinking and individual agency on the part of our students." This is a "delicate dance," she says: we need to "push students to question and analyze their sources while simultaneously asking them to have faith in shared facts and expertise."

One challenge for students is evaluating the quality and veracity of information from primary versus secondary and scholarly versus popular sources – and not assuming that primary and scholarly sources are more reliable. Beall's list is an extensive catalogue of predatory publishers posing as primary sources.

Misinformation on social media is the biggest challenge because that's where kids get most of their information about the world. According to a 2018 study, "junk news" (defined as having at least three of these characteristics: inaccurate, counterfeit, emotional style, unprofessional, no credible sourcing, publication bias) is much more prevalent on politically conservative social media networks than on liberal networks, with far-right Twitter groups being the worst offenders. The problem is that if teachers state this objective and well-documented fact, they can be accused of political bias – even of "indoctrinating" students.

One solution is to use the AllSides website, which compares headlines and articles from across the ideological spectrum. But this can create a "false equivalency" between sources of information on the political left and right, says Maki. In addition, AllSides doesn't take into account several important facts about the contemporary media landscape. According to a 2017 Harvard study:

- The overall journalistic center of gravity is center-left.
- Far-left media sources are less influential than those of the center left.
- For conservative media, the center of attention and influence is on the far right.
- Center-right media sources are of minor importance and influence.
- Left-leaning sources tend to be more objective.

On this last point, the Harvard study found that liberal and conservative media outlets have very different traditions and journalistic practices, with conservative outlets being "highly partisan" and liberal outlets aspiring to "traditions and practices of objective journalism."

AllSides makes no effort to address these distinctions, says Maki: "Their ratings, which are crowdsourced, only address perceived bias, while neglecting the important consideration of journalistic integrity… While AllSides can be a useful tool in comparing partisan representations of news, both students and educators should question the validity of its ratings and seek to evaluate the journalistic integrity of all outlets listed on this site."

The danger, says Maki, is that students will "become cynical and conclude that it's impossible to locate a shared set of facts and engage in civil discourse with people who hold opposing viewpoints." But this scenario won't happen, she believes, if we "create a space in our classrooms where shared facts from sources with minimal bias can be identified so that productive and respectful debate can ensue." Ideally students will engage with facts and ideas, state their views, and listen closely and respectfully to other viewpoints.

"Our goal as educators," Maki concludes, "must never be to indoctrinate our students, but we do have a responsibility to avoid false equivalencies and share the general consensus of experts concerning the current state of our information landscape. We must provide our students with the tools and skills that will help them locate high-quality information and construct their own arguments. In the end, the future of productive debate and civic engagement may very well depend on the information literacy skills of this next generation of American voters."

Maki includes a sidebar with links to online information literacy tools, including: Media Bias/Fact Check, FactCheck, Politifact, Snopes, NewsGuard, Real or Satire, Hoaxy, and Quackwatch.

"Information Literacy in a Polarized Era" by Kelsey Maki in *NJEA Review*, April 2023 (Vol. 96, #9, pp. 22-25); Maki can be reached at syntaxsurfing@gmail.com.

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3. Helping Students Engage in Civil Discourse

(Originally titled "Teaching Students to Talk Across Political Difference")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Richard Weissbourd, Glenn Manning, and Eric Torres (Harvard University) take note of the extreme political polarization of our era. Schools can't solve this problem alone, they say, but "schools are the only institution that can, on a large scale, cultivate in young people the sensibilities and skills to engage constructively with those with opposing ideologies – to view them not as stock characters or villains, but as complex individuals – and seek common ground." The authors offer the following strategies for addressing hot topics that will inevitably find their way into classrooms:

• *Establish norms*. Ground rules for debating controversial issues are best adopted with student input and should include seeking to understand others' intentions and challenging ideas, not people.

• *Use humanizing classroom activities*. Relationship- and culture-building interactions early in the school year help students see those on "the other side" as people, creating a climate where difficult conversations feel safer. An example: a scavenger hunt in which students find fun and meaningful facts about their classmates and teachers. In classrooms where students

share the same political orientation, different points of view can be introduced through readings and visiting speakers.

• *Help students get better at asking questions and listening*. These are especially important skills when addressing fraught topics.

• *Build a common understanding of facts*. "Agreeing on a shared set of practices for investigating reality," say Weissbourd, Manning, and Torres, "– such as identifying criteria for valid news sources, developing a process for reconciling conflicting information, and making explicit how evidence supports one's views – can help clarify points of disagreement and dispel claims that lack support." It's also important to teach about cognitive biases that lead people to ignore disconfirming information.

• *Uphold basic principles and rights*. Moral relativism – the belief that everyone has a right to their opinion and no one can claim their opinion is superior – is dangerous in classroom discussions, say the authors. It's important for teachers to articulate some key moral principles that can serve as guardrails, perhaps drawing on the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

• *Work with parents*. This includes being transparent about what's being discussed in the classroom, focusing on shared values, and presenting varied perspectives (but not those that violate the rights of others). "Too often," say Weissbourd, Manning, and Torres, "it's the loudest, most partisan parents that claim administrators' and teachers' time and attention, while research suggests that the majority of parents care about healing divides in this country and are 'exhausted' by partisan hostility. Elevate these moderate parents who want to dial down the hostility." Conducting surveys of parents may reveal a surprisingly moderate spectrum of opinion.

• *Give students practice debating hot topics, initially with scaffolded discussions*. The authors suggest starting with less-inflammatory topics – for example, the ethics of eating meat – and guiding students as they get better at agreeing on facts, debating the substance, and listening well. Fishbowl discussions, where students take turns participating and observing, are helpful in building skills, with frequent reference to key principles of civil discourse – perhaps these from the Better Arguments Project:

- Take winning off the table.
- Prioritize relationships and listen passionately.
- Pay attention to context.
- Embrace vulnerability.
- Make room to transform.

"Teaching Students to Talk Across Political Difference" by Richard Weissbourd, Glenn Manning, and Eric Torres in *Educational Leadership*, April 2023 (Vol. 80, #7, pp. 20-26); the authors can be reached at richard_weissbourd@gse.harvard.edu, glenn_manning@gse.harvard.edu, and etorres@g.harvard.edu.

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4. Research Insights on Teaching Critical Thinking

(Originally titled "Getting Students Comfortable with Critical Thinking")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Bryan Goodwin (McREL International) shares insights on critical thinking:

• *It is subject-specific*. Learning how to solve a complex mathematics problem, for example, doesn't transfer to being able to analyze a historical source. "We must help students develop distinct critical thinking skills in all subject areas," says Goodwin.

• *Direct instruction is required*. Critical thinking doesn't develop by osmosis or incidental exposure.

• *Schema are helpful*. "Research has shown," Goodwin says, "that one of the biggest differences between experts and novices is that experts use well-developed mental models to solve problems by categorizing them, creating a mental representation of them, retrieving strategies for solving them, and reflecting afterward on the validity of their answer."

Drawing on research for *The New Classroom Instruction That Works*, Goodwin points to three classroom strategies that can put these insights to work on an everyday basis:

- *Structured, real-world problem-solving* – for example, students designing a skateboard ramp and calculating the costs for building it;
- *Cognitive writing* – Students respond to a high-level prompt about prior learning, explaining, analyzing evidence, writing, self-assessing, revising, and defending their ideas, all with feedback and support from the teacher.
- *Guided investigations* – Students read high-interest texts, conduct experiments and investigations to test hypotheses and assumptions, collect evidence based on direct observation and reading, and use it to support findings and conclusions.

"Getting Students Comfortable with Critical Thinking" by Bryan Goodwin in *Educational Leadership*, April 2023 (Vol. 80, #7, pp. 80-81); Goodwin can be reached at bgoodwin@mcrel.org.

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5. Teachers' Ideas for Improving Classroom Discussions

(Originally titled "Tell Us About")

In this *Educational Leadership* feature, teachers share one change they have made that improved class discussions. A selection:

• At the beginning of class, Eric Booth (High Falls, New York) asks every student in his art classes to respond briefly to a question – for example, "In the video we watched, what is one thing you noticed that you think maybe nobody else may have noticed?" This primes the pump and increases participation by shy students later in the lesson.

• Shyloh-Dawn Bonogofski (Dunmore, Alberta, Canada) uses Pear Deck to prompt psychology students to respond to multiple-choice, short-answer, drag-and-drop, and drawing questions. Bonogofski can see students' responses and decide which to share anonymously. This has been a game changer for students with autism.

• Brian Foutz (Manila, Philippines) uses documents and a debatable prompt from the structured academic controversy model in Stanford's Reading Like a Historian materials. His high-school students engage in an informal debate, with an emphasis on reaching consensus versus winning the argument.

• Jane Wingle (Delmar, New York) has her fifth- and sixth-grade ELA students stand when they speak, wait for everyone to be quiet and looking at them, give their answer, and call on classmates who raise their hands with a question – who then follow the same protocol. "My students know that everyone who wants to contribute should be called on before people who have already spoken are called on again," says Wingle. "They do these steps automatically now and have increased their level of respect for themselves as the speaker and for the one they are listening to."

• Melissa Zych (West Hartford, Connecticut) calms and focuses students during transitions, or when they're excited, by using the P.A.U.S.E. model. She gives a "time out" gesture with her hands; students then pause, close their eyes, take a deep breath through their nose and out their nose, then take another deep breath. "The shift in energy is palpable," says Zych. "This one simple change allows students to feel more empowered and confident when they are in my class. They are more willing to share ideas and listen to others."

• Kira Hopkins (Seattle, Washington) says students used to come into her ELA classes focused on how many points they could get by raising their hands and speaking. With ideas from Socratic Seminars and Accountable Talk, Hopkins changed this dynamic by telling students they were accountable to each other for accurate knowledge of the text, getting their facts straight, and rigorous thinking. "The exit slip at the end," she says, "allows them to reflect on what was said and how they contributed, or what else they might add."

• Joel Michor (Denver, Colorado) has begun using a technique from the Self-Leadership Collaborative to deal with students who are acting out during group discussions. "I notice that a part of you is focusing your attention on things not related to this conversation," he says to the disruptive student. "It is important to me that all students feel connected and focused on this discussion. Could you ask the part of you that is getting distracted to see if it would be willing to take a little bit of a break? Later on, we can have a chat about what that part might be needing. Thank you." The result of this approach has been "extraordinary," says Michor.

• Todd Feltman (New York City, New York) gives students time at the beginning of class to unpack the discussion prompt and jot down ideas. "This preparation has helped students have richer discussions," says Feltman.

"Tell Us About" in *Educational Leadership*, April 2023 (Vol. 80, #7, pp. 83-85)

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6. Getting Students to Write At a Deeper Level

(Originally titled "Cultivating Complexity in Student Writing")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Virginia high-school teacher Mike Miller says,

"My job as a teacher is to counter shallow thinking, to encourage students to leave the safety of shallow intellectual waters for the more difficult, but ultimately more rewarding, depth of complexity. While we shouldn't supply our students with ideas, we can help them to focus on their best ones." Guided by his mantra – *With focus comes depth; with depth, complexity* – Miller describes helping a student develop her first draft, which followed the standard five-paragraph essay format, into a much more thoughtful paper.

Miller asks his students to watch for words that scatter, oversimplify, or complicate their writing – avoiding the first two and using more that complicate:

• Words that scatter – Too many plurals and overuse of *and, additionally, another*; also topic sentences that start with *first, second, third, finally*.

• Words that oversimplify – For example*, every, all, total, complete, completely, absolute, absolutely, none, never*. "Often used by students who want to appear decisive," says Miller, "they usually wind up painting the writers into difficult-to-defend intellectual corners."

• Words that complicate – These are signs of deeper thinking – for example, *while, although, despite, but, yet, however*.

"Cultivating Complexity in Student Writing" by Mike Miller in *Educational Leadership*, April 2023 (Vol. 80, #7, pp. 58-61); Miller can be reached at MHMiller2@fcps.edu.

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7. A High-School Student Speaks Up for Young Adult Literature

In this letter responding to Pamela Paul's March 9, 2023 *New York Times* column on the devaluation of English courses and majors, Chicago 11th grader Avery Hendrix pushes back on Paul's contention that when teachers assign commercial young adult novels, they "lowball student competence."

Not so, says Hendrix: "While yes, I would agree that James Joyce has more literary merit than say, J.K. Rowling, I would ask that my fellow readers remember that reading is about examination. Of a time, an author, a character, a theme – to read is to explore. Any distaste for contemporary literature, especially young adult literature, highlights an unwillingness to explore, to chart the seas of pages, to find things you love and things you don't. There are modern authors I don't care for, who I think are indicative of the commercialization of literature that is becoming more and more concerning, but I would still love to read their work in a classroom setting. From an exploratory lens. Are classics important? Of course! Is the present just as important? Yes."

"English Class Shapes Your Life: Readers Respond to a Column by Pamela Paul About the Value of English Courses and Majors" in *The New York Times*, March 26, 2023

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8. More Applications for ChatGPT and Other Large Language Models

In this *New York Times* article, Kevin Roose says he's been using ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence tools almost every day for several months and found they are sometimes

erratic and inaccurate and can act strangely toward users. Nevertheless, Roose has found some areas in which the chatbots are very useful:

• *Explaining concepts at multiple levels* – for example, explicating the theory of relativity at the middle-school level. "Calling on an infinitely patient, zero-cost tutor to guide me through new subjects feels like a superpower," says Roose. "Used properly, they can be amazing teaching tools."

• *Editing and constructive criticism* – You can feed in an essay, letter, proposal, or e-mail and ask the bot to tighten an argument, poke holes in your reasoning, or use Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* to suggest edits based on its principles.

• *Getting creatively unstuck* – Recently Roose was having difficulty coming up with questions to ask a podcast guest. He pasted in the person's bio and asked the bot to give him "10 thoughtful, incisive interview questions." He says the suggestions were "pretty good" and he ended up using more than one. Bots can also help overcome writer's block by providing a running start on a writing product.

• *Acting as a sounding board* – Preparing for a difficult conversation with a friend, Roose asked ChatGPT to take part in a role-play, responding as this person might. When Roose had the actual conversation, it wasn't painless, but rehearsing with the chatbot was helpful.

• *SparkNotes for everything* – One of large language models' strongest abilities is quickly summarizing large amounts of text. With long articles and dense academic papers, the bots get the big ideas right, says Roose, even if some details are missing. A bot can quickly summarize the transcript of a two-hour podcast in a few bullet points.

• *Coding, even if you don't code* – An unintended result of large language models scouring the Internet has been the ability to write code that actually works – something known as "emergent behavior."

Roose ends with a cautionary note: always carefully check what the bots produce!

"How Should I Use A.I. Chatbots Like ChatGPT?" by Kevin Roose in *The New York Times*, April 8, 2023

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9. Children's Books That Bring Humor to a Serious Time

"The fact of the matter is that the world of 2023 is a pretty sober place," says Betsy Bird in this *School Library Journal* article. She suggests eight books to help students (and adults) laugh a little, even about unfunny subjects (click the link below for cover images and short summaries):

- *Where Butterflies Fill the Sky: A Story of Immigration, Family, and Finding Home* by Zahra Marwan (preschool-grade 3)
- *Planet Omar* (a series) by Zanib Mian, grade 3-6
- *Killer Underwear Invasion! How to Spot Fake News, Disinformation, and Conspiracy Theories* by Elise Gravel, grade 3 and up
- *Wink* by Rob Harrell (grade 4-7)

- *Save the People! Halting Human Extinction* by Stacy McAnulty, illustrated by Nicole Miles, grade 6 and up
- *Funny Girl: Funniest. Stories. EVER*, edited by Betsy Bird, middle school
- *Maybe an Artist* by Liz Montague, grade 7 and up
- *Huda F Are You?* by Huda Fahmy, grade 7 and up

"Funny Books, Unfunny Times" by Betsy Bird in *School Library Journal*, April 2023 (Vol. 69, #4, pp. 30-33)

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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
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
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
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
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education