Marshall Memo 681

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
April 10, 2017

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"[W]ell-being consists not merely of feeling happy (an emotion that can be fleeting) but of experiencing a sense of contentment in the knowledge that your life is flourishing and has meaning beyond your own pleasure."

Julie Scelfo summarizing the work of Martin Seligman (see item #1)

"Do our students know how to control their devices instead of the other way around?"

Beth Holland (see item #2)

"[T]hat's what good teachers do: They get inside their own heads and consider what's happening in their students' minds so that, like Isaac Newton watching an apple fall from a tree, they'll have some eureka moments of their own."

Bryan Goodwin in "Learning Styles: It's Complicated" in *Educational Leadership*, April 2017 (Vol. 74, #7, p. 74-78), http://bit.ly/2okBRrh; Goodwin can be reached at bgoodwin@mcrel.org.

"The trouble is that when we identify students by their disabilities, we unwittingly put them at risk for linguistic overprotection and covert segregation."

Deborah Wolter in "From Labels to Opportunities" in *Educational Leadership*, April 2017 (Vol. 74, #7, p. 74-78), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/2oEUx3j; Wolter can be reached at wolter@aaps.k12.mi.us.

"Children see differences, not disabilities."

Alison Venter, a former teacher, now assistant principal and literacy/numeracy coach in Tasmania, Australia, who is 3 feet 3 inches tall due to a rare form of dwarfism called diastrophic dysplasia, in "What I've Learned as a Teacher with a Disability" in *Educational Leadership*, April 2017 (Vol. 74, #7, online only), http://bit.ly/2nydSWN; Venter can be reached at alison.venter@education.tas.gov.au.

1. Keys to Happiness

In this sidebar article within a *New York Times Education Life* piece on stressed-out suburban high-school students, author/journalist Julie Scelfo reports on what psychologists say about cultivating lasting well-being and happiness. "Psychology is generally focused on how to relieve the negative emotions of depression, anger, and worry," says Martin Seligman (University of Pennsylvania). "Freud and Schopenhauer said the most you can ever hope for in life is not to suffer, not to be miserable, and I think that view is empirically false, morally insidious, and a political and educational dead-end. What makes life worth living is much more than the absence of the negative."

Scelfo summarizes Seligman's more positive philosophy: "[W]ell-being consists not merely of feeling happy (an emotion that can be fleeting) but of experiencing a sense of contentment in the knowledge that your life is flourishing and has meaning beyond your own pleasure." The key is cultivating the components of well-being, which include engagement, good relationships, accomplishment, and purpose. Four strategies that Seligman and other psychologists have found to be effective:

• *Identify signature strengths*. Write down a story about a time when you were at your best and re-read it every day for a week, asking, *What personal strengths did I display when I was at my best? Creativity? Good judgment? Kindness? Loyalty? Courage? Passion? Forgiveness? Honesty?* Writing down key qualities "puts you in touch with what you're good at," says Seligman. Then you can think about how to use those strengths to your advantage, intentionally organizing and structuring your life around them.

• *Find the good*. Set aside ten minutes before going to bed, write down three things that went really well that day, and ask with each, *Why did this good thing happen?* This exercise "turns your attention to the good things in life, so it changes what you attend to," says Seligman. "Consciousness is like your tongue: It swirls around in the mouth looking for a cavity, and when it finds it, you focus on it. Imagine if your tongue went looking for a beautiful, healthy tooth."

• *Make a gratitude visit*. Think of someone who has been especially kind to you and hasn't been properly thanked, write a letter describing something he or she did that benefited your life, and then get together and read the letter out loud. Seligman reports that when people do this, there are often tears of joy: "It puts you in better touch with other people, with your place in the world."

• *Respond more strongly*. The next time someone you care about shares good news, go beyond the regular "That's nice" response and express genuine excitement, prolong the conversation, and encourage the person to tell others or engage in a celebratory activity.

"The Happy Factor: Practicing the Art of Well-Being" by Julie Scelfo in *The New York Times Education Life*, April 9, 2017, http://nyti.ms/2nxK6l5

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2. It's Not How Much Screen Time Students Have, But How It's Used

"What if, instead of asking our students to put their devices away, we instead ask them to consider how they might be using those devices to improve themselves and their community?" asks Beth Holland in this *Edutopia* article. She draws on a book by Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge, *The Triple Focus: A New Approach to Education* (More Than Sound, 2014) to suggest three desiderata for digital devices: Focusing on ourselves; tuning in to others; and understanding the larger world:

• *Inner focus* – Devices give students access to an infinite amount of information and unlimited distraction, so the challenge is how to learn self-awareness and self-management. "Do our students know how to control their devices instead of the other way around?" asks Holland. "Do they know what they need to do to maintain their focus and allow their brains to process the context around them?" Students need explicit instruction on techniques like restricting their devices to a single app and silencing calls, alerts, and notifications to support self-regulation. "By leveraging both the technology and active reflection," says Holland, "we can help students recognize what they need to do to be successful learners and realize when to put devices away."

• *Outer focus* – Tablets and smartphones may not be the primary problem, says Holland. After all, students can be supremely self-absorbed reading hard-copy books. And it's possible they may see restrictions on screen time as signaling that when they're grown up, they'll be able to spend as much time as they like self-absorbed in the digital world. "Ultimately," says Holland, "students need the ability to tune in to others in both the physical and digital worlds." Young people need to see adults modeling positive use – interacting with each other face to face, on the phone, and on their devices.

• *Other focus* – "Screen time discussions often focus on just that: the screen," says Holland. This may prevent young people from grasping how their actions fit within a broader system. In the classroom, teachers might ask students to consider how their use of devices affects classroom culture: "What norms might the class decide to establish? Can the students identify different contexts where they may or may not want screens involved? What actions might the students take if they feel as though the norms of the class have been violated? How can they collaborate to seek out solutions to new problems that may present themselves?... By learning to recognize a larger system, students build a greater understanding of the implications and consequences of their actions in both the physical and digital worlds."

"How Much Screen Time? That's the Wrong Question" by Beth Holland in *Edutopia*, January 30, 2017, https://www.edutopia.org/article/reframing-debate-screen-time-beth-holland

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3. Behavior-Based Interview Questions for Hiring an Assistant Principal

When hiring an assistant principal, says Mary Clement (Berry College) in this *Principal Leadership* article, it's not a good use of time to ask fuzzy questions like "Tell us about yourself" or "What is your philosophy of education?" Nor is it especially helpful to discuss whether to hire from inside or outside, whether to favor someone with administrative versus only teaching experience, or how similar or different a candidate should be from the current principal. "What is needed," says Clement, "is a set of interview questions that ascertain candidates' past training, knowledge, and experience." Since past behavior is the best predictor of future performance, questions should be framed to elicit specific information about what candidates have actually done in previous jobs or life experiences.

For starters, the school needs to attract a pool of qualified candidates and clarify the duties of the school's assistant principal – discipline, teacher evaluation, testing, budget, facilities, parent and community relations, etc. But the heart of the matter is developing a set of behavior-based questions that will be asked of each candidate and thinking through what the committee is looking for with each question and how candidates' responses will be rated – perhaps a 5-4-3-2-1 scale or No experience/ Some experience/Wow! Clement suggests questions like these, which are suitable for candidates with some administrative experience and teachers who have had some outside-classroom duties and/or been through a good internship or mentoring program:

- Tell us about any leadership experiences you have had.
- What strengths have you shown in your past leadership?
- How have you worked with others in curriculum planning and implementation?
- Describe your experience with standardized testing and the use of test results.
- Describe your classroom management techniques.
- Talk about student discipline policies you're familiar with and why they work.
- What have you found to be the most important results from student extracurricular activities?
- Tell us about your experiences supporting a new hire or student teacher.
- Describe a time when a teacher came to you with a question or concern and what you did.
- Have you had opportunities to create and manage a budget? If so, please describe those experiences.
- Describe your experiences with facilities management within school or outside of school.
- Describe positive means of communication you've built with parents.
- How have you shared the work of your students with the community?
- How have you taken advantage of community resources in the classroom?

- Explain the demographics of your current school, sharing data about low-income families, English language learners, or other populations.
- Give an example of how you have communicated with parents, administrators, or community members about your work and/or your students' work.
- Describe your work on a project or committee where real collaboration took place.

"Behavior-Based Interviewing" by Mary Clement in *Principal Leadership*, April 2017 (Vol. 17, #8, p. 40-43), no e-link available; Clement can be reached at mclement@berry.edu. For summaries of previous articles by Clement on interview questions, see Memos 29, 87, 186, 217, 275, 306 (a "classic"), and 432.

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4. Students Who Developed Strategies to Deal with Their Disabilities

(Originally titled "How Did You Get to Harvard?")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Thomas Hehir (Harvard University) reports on his interviews with 16 students who made it to graduate school at Harvard with dyslexia, deafness, blindness, muscular dystrophy, psychiatric disability, and other disabilities. They all had ups and downs, but there was one common thread: they worked with their teachers, therapists, and parents to develop strategies that enabled them to succeed. Some themes:

• *Seeing potential* – The young people Hehir interviewed were aware of their disabilities in school, understood how they learned, didn't accept their limitations, and knew they needed specific tools and skills. Almost all of them succeeded because a teacher or therapist believed in their potential and pushed them to reach higher. One student with deteriorating eyesight was challenged by a math teacher to solve problems in front of the class. The teacher told the principal, "This girl's got it."

• *Working around a disability* – "Once these young people had developed confidence that their disabilities shouldn't limit their intellectual potential," says Hehir, "strategies that enabled them to fully access a challenging curriculum were central to their success." One student couldn't read in the early elementary grades and had difficulty sitting still. After repeating third grade, he spent two years in a special school for students with dyslexia and learned to read, extract information from text, and organize his writing. By the time he got to high school, he said, "I was better at tackling and solving problems than most kids."

• *From "badass" to researcher* – The parents of one boy who struggled in elementary school resisted special education, which they regarded as segregated. In middle school, his strategy was to misbehave. "If I'm not going to do well in the classroom," he said, "then I'd better be able to hold my own on the playground." However, some teachers saw his talent in math and music. In high school he began to read for pleasure and hang out with high-performing peers, and a liberal arts college allowed him to design an individualized program. He connected with peers who were more facile at reading and gradually came to terms with his dyslexia. Most of his friends from middle school are in prison, but this young man is now a senior researcher at a large research company.

• *The role of technology*. Hehir says another theme in his interviews was how finding the right technology could be a turning point. One student with cerebral palsy remembers a teacher introducing him to his first computer which, he says, "would ultimately transform my life because it would allow me to express myself." Another student used text-to-speech technology to handle almost all his reading and writing in graduate school. A student who lost his vision in surgery manages ideas and coursework using a software program named JAWS – www.freedomscientific.com/Products/Blindless/JAWS. Braille is too slow for school reading, but he still uses it to read for pleasure. "I'm not listening to another's voice but creating words and images for myself," he says.

The sad thing, concludes Hehir, is that there aren't more stories like this. "The cost of assistive technologies has gone down; some are now free," he says. "But I keep encountering the barrier of attitudes." Some educators seem to believe reading with an assistive device is "not reading" or gives students an unfair advantage. Not true, says Hehir. "Text is the most efficient means we have to communicate knowledge, develop vocabulary, and impart the wisdom of the ages to children, even for students who struggle the most with reading. All learners should experience the joy and benefits of reading."

"How Did You Get to Harvard?" by Thomas Hehir in *Educational Leadership*, April 2017 (Vol. 74, #7, p. 36-40), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/2ojRQWP; Hehir can be reached at Thomas_Hehir@gse.harvard.edu. This article was drawn from Hehir's book with Laura Schifter, *How Did You Get Here? Students with Disabilities and Their Journeys to Harvard* (Harvard Education Press, 2015).

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5. Harnessing the Strengths of Students with Dyslexia

(Originally titled "Recognizing Dyslexia's Strengths in the Classroom")

"There is a quiet revolution taking place in our understanding of dyslexia," says Fernette Eide (Dyslexia Advantage) in this article in *Educational Leadership*. "No longer seen as a disease, disorder, or defect, dyslexia is being embraced as a common learning difference affecting some 15-20 percent of the population whose bearers have distinctive strengths as well as specific preferences in modes of learning." The premier designer at Apple, Google's first chief information officer, a top-grossing film director, and the inventor of the first compact disk are all dyslexic.

But it's easy for students with dyslexia to become discouraged in school, especially if the classroom culture emphasizes competition, performance, getting good grades, rote learning of spelling and basic math facts, and working against the clock. "Dyslexic students can be found in every classroom," says Eide, "although many may not be formally identified as such. Teachers have tremendous potential to affect these students at a time when they are at greatest risk for low self-esteem and underachievement."

Eide and her husband, Brock Eide, have identified four strengths of people with dyslexia – their acronym is MIND – that teachers can consider when planning curriculum units and lessons:

• *M-strengths* – These spatial reasoning and navigational abilities help people reason about the physical or material world. Teachers can support the success of students with dyslexia by presenting concepts with manipulatives and incorporating hands-on projects.

• *I-strengths* – Interconnected reasoning helps people see how different ideas, objects, or experiences are related. Students with I-strengths can more easily see things, people, and events from different points of view. Teachers can support the success of students with I-strengths by challenging students to think from an unconventional perspective, combine ideas from different disciplines, and use creative, divergent thinking.

• *N-strengths* – Narrative reasoning is helpful when constructing a sequence of mental scenes to recall the past, explain the present, or simulate the future. N-strengths can come to the fore in the classroom when teachers have students translate vivid mental images and narratives into the written word or other forms of expression, and also when teachers have students use stories and mnemonics to memorize material.

• *D-strengths* – Dynamic reasoning is the ability to see patterns and trends to make predictions about the future. Teachers can harness D-strengths with lessons that get students dealing with complex systems that change over time – geology, paleontology, social networks, complex games, and the study of history and culture.

"Recognizing Dyslexia's Strengths in the Classroom" by Fernette Eide in *Educational Leadership*, April 2017 (Vol. 74, #7, online only), http://bit.ly/2o1ujIi; Eide can be reached at drseide@gmail.com.

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6. Universal Design for Learning in Action

(Originally titled UDL: A Blueprint for Learning Success")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Spencer Salend and Catharine Whittaker (State University of New York/New Paltz) deconstruct Universal Design for Learning. UDL makes instruction accessible to all students in the same way that a ramp makes a sidewalk accessible to wheelchairs, strollers, bicycles, skateboards, and delivery carts. When UDL is executed skillfully, it meets the needs of a wide range of students by providing multiple means of:

- Representation – content is presented in a variety of ways;
- Action and expression – students can respond and show their learning in several modes;
- Engagement – teachers use a range of practices to boost student motivation.

Salend and Whittaker suggest seven steps for optimal implementation of UDL:

• *Understand students' learning differences*. Before designing a unit and its component lessons, teachers need to get a handle on students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds and their academic, behavioral, and social interests, strengths, preferences, and challenges.

• *Conduct an ecological assessment*. This includes curriculum expectations, assessments, technology, class size, classroom layout, support personnel, collaboration with colleagues, and how students are accustomed to working with each other.

• *Customize learning goals and objectives*. "Learning objectives may vary," say Salend and Whittaker, "in the amount of content to be learned, the level of difficulty of that content,

the pace at which students are expected to learn, and the ways in which students are expected to demonstrate their learning."

• *Identify possible barriers to student success*. Certain ways of presenting content may cause problems; there might be limits on how students are allowed to respond; and certain approaches might not motivate students.

• *Select UDL solutions*. Taking into account the barriers, teachers need to find the best ways to present material, engage all students, and get them responding. For example, a teacher might use color, graphic organizers, and enlarged type size to highlight important information; incorporate animals to spur interest in particular students; use manipulatives; and get students working in small groups.

• *Ensure that UDL solutions are well implemented*. This means monitoring timing, materials, technology, groupings, and implementation.

• *Assess results*. The bottom line: how did the UDL plan affect student learning, behavior, and socialization? Artifacts might include tests, performance tasks, student work, teacher observations, interviews, and self-reflection.

"UDL: A Blueprint for Learning Success" by Spencer Salend and Catharine Whittaker in *Educational Leadership*, April 2017 (Vol. 74, #7, p. 59-63), available for purchase at http://bit.ly/2oSlYK8; the authors can be reached at salends@newpaltz.edu and catharinewhittaker@gmail.com.

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7. An Ambitious Kindergarten Science Curriculum

In this article in *Elementary School Journal*, Tanya Wright and Amelia Wenk Gotwals (Michigan State University) say that science is being neglected in many primary-grade classrooms. One recent study found that kindergarten students are getting an average of only 2.3 minutes a day of science instruction, and 1.6 minutes of teachers reading aloud from informational texts. This paucity of science and information-based literacy content is especially prevalent in schools serving low-income students. Skimping on science and informational texts may be a product of test-prep anxiety as students gear up for high-stakes tests later in elementary schools or the time-honored theory that students should learn to read before reading to learn. It's not surprising that by fourth grade, U.S. students do poorly on NAEP science assessments and demonstrate better comprehension on literary than informational texts.

Wright and Gotwals believe students in the primary grades can and should learn science content in line with the Next Generation science standards. They conducted a study to see if a rigorous curriculum would be help kindergarten students learn to share observations, describe patterns, ask questions, and construct an argument supported by evidence. They used the SOLID Start curriculum (Science, Oral Language, and Literacy Development from the Start of School) with 147 students in high-poverty schools, with the following key components:

• *Ask* – In each lesson the teacher poses a "driving question" to guide students in collecting real-world evidence and spark discussion – for example, *What is wind?*

• *Explore* – Children delve into science phenomena through dramatic play and other activities – for example, children blow air through straws and catch air in plastic bags. The teacher asks students questions like, *Can you make faster and slower wind? Is there another way you can make air move with these materials?*

• *Read* – Teachers do interactive read-alouds with an informational trade book each day to build students' vocabulary, expose them to science words and phrases, and spark discussions on the driving question. In the wind lesson, the teacher might read from Vicki Cobb's book, *I Face the Wind* and introduce words like *wind, air, force, blow/blowing/blows, flutter, weather conditions, strong/stronger, slant.*

• *Discuss* – Teachers support discussion and scaffold students in answering the driving question with scientific explanations including claims and evidence from their investigation and the read-aloud text. Teacher prompts might include, *What is wind? What did you learn today that helps you answer this question? What evidence did you find in the book we read? What did you observe during your exploration?*

• *Draw and write* – The SOLID curriculum gets students writing and drawing about their observations and questions through interactive writing on an easel and in their science journals. Categories include *Our Questions, Our Claims,* and *Our Evidence.*

The first iteration of the curriculum got promising results, but there was quite a lot of pushback from teachers, the main concern being how to get students engaged in appropriate science talk:

- Some teachers said they themselves weren't very comfortable with science vocabulary and concepts.
- Teachers said the science trade books suggested by the researchers were too challenging for kindergarten.
- Teachers asked for more structure in the writing tasks – e.g., lines to write on, boxes to draw in when comparing two observations.
- Teachers wanted more active and multimodal activities, for example, having students move their bodies to show calm, breezy, and windy conditions or miming different thermometer readings.

These concerns led the researchers to provide more structure and guidance for teachers and make a number of other tweaks in the curriculum. A second implementation of the SOLID curriculum produced better results – students' science learning and sophistication increased substantially with each four-week unit, and they substantially outperformed peers in a control group.

Why the significant gains? One factor was that teachers devoted more time to science instruction, but Wright and Gotwals believe student learning improved because of the intriguing SOLID content and the pedagogy used to teach it. "Our observational and interview data indicate that kindergarteners were capable of, engaged in, and so excited about science that they began to talk about ideas from science instruction beyond science lessons," say the authors. "Teachers' descriptions suggest that even children who typically struggle in their classrooms (e.g., a child who works with a learning specialist, a child who is learning English)

were active participants in this curriculum." They learned vocabulary like *energy, herbivore,* and *consumer* and talked about science with family members when they got home. An additional reason for the success of the curriculum was the researchers' willingness to make significant modifications to the curriculum in response to teachers' feedback.

"Supporting Kindergarteners' Science Talk in the Context of an Integrated Science and Disciplinary Literacy Curriculum" by Tanya Wright and Amelia Wenk Gotwals in *Elementary School Journal*, March 2017 (Vol. 117, #3, p. 513-537), no e-link available. The authors can be reached at tswright@msu.edu and gotwals@msu.edu.

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8. Some Telling Statistics on Career Technical Education

(Originally titled "Career Technical Education: Pathways Toward Postsecondary Success")

In this *ASCD Policy Priorities* article, Barbara Michelman presents statistics that put career technical education (CTE) in perspective:

- Percent of U.S. high-school seniors prepared for college math and reading – 37%
- Percent in a college prep program with rigorous CTE who are college ready – 80%
- Average high-school graduation rate for students concentrating in CTE – 93%
- Percent of dropouts who said that relevant, real-world learning would have kept them in high school – 81%
- Number of U.S. high-school students currently in CTE classes – 11 million
- Percent of manufacturers who report that talent shortages will affect their ability to meet customer demand – 80%
- Number of manufacturing jobs currently open – 315,000
- Number of trade, transportation, and utilities sector jobs currently open – 1,019,000
- Number of job openings predicted by 2020 – 55 million
- Percent of STEM jobs open to workers with less than a bachelor's degree – 50%
- Percent of those jobs that will require some college or a 2-year associate's degree – 30%
- Percent of people with less than an associate's degree, including licenses and certificates, who earn more than the average bachelor's degree recipient – 27%
- Graduates with a technical or applied science associate's degree out-earn their peers with a bachelor's degree by – $2,000-$11,000

"Career Technical Education: Pathways Toward Postsecondary Success" by Barbara Michelman in *ASCD Policy Priorities*, Spring 2017 (Vol. 23, #1, p. 1-7), http://bit.ly/2o1R5z2

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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 others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 45 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 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).

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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
Communiqué
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
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
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The Education Gadfly
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time Magazine