Marshall Memo 488

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
June 3, 2013

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"I'd scrap any state-prescribed 'accountability' below the level of the school. In other words, no more rigid teacher-evaluation systems. Leave personnel issues to the principals."

Michael Petrilli (see item #1)

"You can't just empower anyone. You have to empower a team of people who actually know what they are doing… They need to have a coherent pedagogical vision, know how to build a curriculum, know how to create a positive school culture, know how to build and follow a sensible budget, know how to put reasonable 'internal controls' in place, know how to recruit a great staff, and on and on."

Michael Petrilli on starting charter schools (*ibid*.)

"[P]rincipal evaluations are 'generally inconsistent, unaligned with standards for good practice, not relevant to principals' main goals and responsibilities, and generally not valid and rigorous.'"

Jackie Zubrzycki (2012), quoted in "Principal Evaluation and Professional Growth" by Christy Guilfoyle in *ASCD Policy Priorities*, Summer 2013 (Vol. 19, #2, p. 1), http://bit.ly/1aW3E0w

"[T]he early career of teachers is a time of pronounced growth and reorganization of thinking about one's role as a professional, the capabilities of students, the goals of instruction, and how to support learning,"

Jessica Thompson, Mark Windschitl, and Melissa Braaten (see item #4)

"I have no clue what I just read."

A fourth grader who just finished reading a gimmicky e-book (see item #6)

1. Are We Turning the Corner on Using Test Scores to Evaluate Teachers?

In this *Education Gadfly* article (originally an *Education Week* blog post that's part of an ongoing dialogue with Deborah Meier), Michael Petrilli sketches the outlines of an accountability system that "empowers excellent educators to create top-notch schools while ensuring a basic level of quality for everyone." He admits that many of the first wave of charter schools did not do well and wonders why. Was it poverty (most charters serve low-income students)? Was it inadequate funding? Or was the notion of professional autonomy misguided? "My own take is that freedom – for educators to do their work and for parents to choose an environment that's right for their children – is necessary, but not sufficient, for the creation of excellent schools," says Petrilli. There has to be some oversight and quality control – but not too much: "That's because of a simple fact of human psychology: We hate being told what to do."

And it's also essential that empowerment be accompanied by expertise. "You can't just empower anyone," says Petrilli. "You have to empower a team of people who actually know what they are doing… They need to have a coherent pedagogical vision, know how to build a curriculum, know how to create a positive school culture, know how to build and follow a sensible budget, know how to put reasonable 'internal controls' in place, know how to recruit a great staff, and on and on."

But how should schools be held accountable? Petrilli thinks the original charter school idea of customized achievement targets was good, but it got lost when most charter schools jumped on the No Child Left Behind bandwagon and embraced the same test-score accountability system as regular public schools. This resulted in less pedagogical diversity in charter schools as they adopted traditional models of instruction focused on improving test scores. So here's what Petrilli suggests going forward:

- As a default, continue with standards and annual tests, but upgrade them to the Common Core level of rigor.
- Hold schools accountable for making solid progress with their students from September to June, with greater progress expected for struggling students.
- Give lots of extra help to struggling schools to support curriculum development, teacher training, etc.
- Stop using test scores to evaluate individual teachers: "I'd scrap any state-prescribed 'accountability' below the level of the school," says Petrilli. "In other words, no more rigid teacher-evaluation systems. Leave personnel issues to the principals."

- Allow all schools to make the case for being held accountable for a different set of outcomes measure – for example, how elementary students do in middle school, how middle-school students do in high school, and how high-school students do in college.
- Use school inspections as part of the accountability system.

The last two "would be rigorous but designed to supportive of, rather than oppositional to, the cause of excellent schools," Petrilli concludes. "And they might be particularly important to educators of a more progressive, anti-testing bent."

"Bad to Good and Good to Great" by Michael Petrilli in *The Education Gadfly*, May 30, 2013 (Vol. 13, #21), http://bit.ly/10LGOrr

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2. Are British School Inspections Effective?

In this thoughtful *Education Next* article, Iftikhar Hussain (University of Sussex, England) argues that school inspections as practiced in the U.K. are the most-effective policy lever for improving struggling schools – more effective than using test scores alone. His study found that inspections brought about dramatic improvements in underperforming schools, narrowing the achievement gap. His results, he says, "are consistent with the view that children of low-income parents, arguably the least vocal in holding teachers accountable, benefit the most from inspections."

But can't schools game inspections the same way they can game test scores? Not the way inspections are practiced in England, says Hussain. Here are the key characteristics of school visits conducted by Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education):

• *Mission* – Ofsted was set up in the early 1990s to give feedback to principals and teachers, help parents choose schools, and identify schools with serious weaknesses. Inspection results are publicly available on the Internet.

• *Frequency* – Ofsted inspection teams make one 1-2 day visit to each school during each 3-6 year inspection cycle.

• *Virtually unannounced* – Schools have only 2-3 days notice of their Ofsted visits, giving them very little time to put on a dog-and-pony show. Inspections can take place at any point in the academic year, from September to July. Thus, schools have a strong incentive to be effective all the time. Hussain found no evidence that failing schools were able to inflate their test scores to throw inspectors off the trail – inspections of low-rated schools were too frequent and thorough for that to be possible.

• *Criteria* – Inspection teams look at a combination of hard metrics (test scores and other data) and softer ones (classroom visits, interviews with administrators, teachers, students, and parents, and observation of school practices) to evaluate each school's effectiveness. Parents are asked about the interest teachers show in their children, school discipline, children's academic progress, and feedback from teachers. Fourteen-year-old students are asked whether teachers take action when a student breaks a rule, keep order in class, assign and check homework, and grade students' work. Interestingly, the soft criteria don't always

correlate with test scores; some schools with low test scores receive top ratings if inspectors see progress and are impressed with other factors.

• *Ratings* – Schools receive the inspection report with a narrative and "grade" on a five-point scale:

- Outstanding (13 percent of schools got this rating from September 2006 to July 2009)
- Good (48 percent of schools got this rating)
- Satisfactory (33 percent)
- Notice to Improve (4.5 percent)
- Special Measures (1.5 percent)

Schools receiving the lowest ratings may be required to make changes in their leadership team and governing board, receive increased resources, and get more-intensive monitoring.

Do low-rated schools improve? Hussain analyzed the normal ups and downs of schools' test scores and tried to separate the impact of unfavorable inspection ratings. He found that schools that receive low ratings dramatically improve student achievement. But are these schools gaming the system by removing low-scoring students from the testing pool, focusing remediation on "bubble" students (those just below the proficiency threshold), and doing test prep? He looked closely for all three of these "strategic" approaches and found they were not present – that schools truly improved and sustained those improvements over time. "My results suggest that, following a fail rating and the subsequent increased oversight of schools, teachers increase their effort," says Hussain. "This rise in effort may be greatest where previously there was the greatest slack." One reason may be the public nature of school inspection reports. "Simply disseminating inspection ratings and reports" shines a bright light on ineffective practices and creates strong incentives for schools to make genuine improvements.

Are inspections worth the time and effort? One thing that Hussain was particularly interested in was whether inspectors picked up information that couldn't be gleaned from a school's test scores. His conclusion: definitely yes. "In short, this analysis confirms that inspection ratings can help detect differences in teacher practice and parental satisfaction among schools with similar test-score rankings and socioeconomic composition."

"The School Inspector Calls" by Iftikhar Hussain in *Education Next*, Summer 2013 (Vol. 13, #3, p 66-72), http://educationnext.org/the-school-inspector-calls/

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3. The Trouble with Averages

In this *New York Times* article, Stephanie Coontz (Evergreen State College) says that knowing the average can be helpful – for example, one's college paper is not as good as those written by most classmates, or most people my age don't exercise as much as I do. "Averages are useful because many traits, behaviors, and outcomes are distributed in a bell-shaped curve," says Coontz, "with most results clustered around the middle and a much smaller group of outliers at the high and low ends."

But averages can be misleading if a small number of disproportionately weighty outliers pull the average in one direction or the other. Some examples:

- If Warren Buffett and Oprah Winfrey moved to a small Midwestern city, its average income would rise dramatically.
- Most children of divorced parents turn out fine, but those who grow up to be very troubled (a small percent) exaggerate the impact of divorce in many people's minds.
- The most-common response to the death of a loved one is a sharp decline in personal well-being, followed by a slow, gradual recovery. But some people have a much more severe and long-lasting period of bereavement, others are ready to move on quite quickly, and a few actually experience an improvement in life satisfaction. Treating them all according to the "average" is a mistake.
- On average, married people are happier than unmarried people, but is that a reason to promote marriage? It turns out that 80 percent of people who get married were happy in the first place. "More often, marriage seems to be a reward for having a high level of well-being than a route to attaining it," says Coontz.
- Single motherhood, on average, is stressful. But one study found that young, single, black and Hispanic mothers who married after the birth of a child were less healthy at the age of 40 than those who hadn't married.

"I am not advocating that we give up on averages," Coontz concludes. "Used cautiously, they help to analyze patterns and formulate policies. But given the variety of circumstances that exist in the messy real world, we ought to think twice before doling out one-size-fits-all advice to individuals on the basis of averages."

"When Numbers Mislead" by Stephanie Coontz in *The New York Times*, May 26, 2013 (p. SR12), http://nyti.ms/17405bp

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4. What Happens When Novice Teachers Encounter Reality?

In this thoughtful *American Educational Research Journal* article, teacher-educators Jessica Thompson and Mark Windschitl (University of Washington) and Melissa Braaten (University of Wisconsin-Madison) report on their three-year study of how rookie science teachers fared when they moved from graduate school to practicum to the real world of secondary-school classrooms. "[T]he early career of teachers is a time of pronounced growth and reorganization of thinking about one's role as a professional, the capabilities of students, the goals of instruction, and how to support learning," say Thompson, Windschitl, and Braaten. Unfortunately, it's very common for rookie teachers to leave behind the "best practices" they learned during their training and regress to the traditional, teacher-centered instructional practices they see being used by their new colleagues.

Thompson, Windschitl, and Braaten begin by describing the ambitious science teaching practices they taught their teachers-in-training:

• *Selecting big ideas and models* – Focusing on a small number of important ideas framed by overarching essential questions, which gives coherence and purpose to lessons and scientific investigations.

• *Working with students' ideas* – Eliciting and making visible students' conceptions and misconceptions about the topic and using those to inform instructional decisions and connect science learning to students' lives. Throughout each unit, teachers check on students' understanding using formal and informal assessments and adjust instruction accordingly.

• *Working with science ideas* – Helping students understand science "not as a set of facts, but rather as testable models or theories that are revised over time based on evidence and new ideas," say the authors.

• *Pressing for explanation* – Continuously asking students "*what* happened in a science activity, *how* something happened, and a causal explanation for *why* something happened," say Thompson, Windschitl, and Braaten. "Novice teachers used this framework to examine samples of students' work and to interrogate their own understanding of the science content."

How well did new teachers carry out these ambitious teaching practices into their classrooms? They fell into three groups:

- Trajectory 1 teachers were successful at using all four practices.
- Trajectory 2 teachers used only a few in isolated pockets of the curriculum.
- Trajectory 3 teachers didn't implement them at all (although they used some of the rhetoric as a fig-leaf over conventional teaching practices).

What made the difference? Thompson, Windschitl, and Braaten found three explanations:

• *First, who teachers identified with* – Teachers varied in how they navigated the "two worlds" of university training and their school colleagues. Those who successfully used ambitious teaching practices identified and related primarily with the university. The Trajectory 2 teachers tried to straddle the university and school contexts, using some progressive practices but conforming to the more traditional expectations of their principals and science departments. And Trajectory 3 teachers totally identified with their new colleagues and conventional instruction.

• *Second, using students' thinking* – All the new teachers checked for student understanding, but only Trajectory 1 teachers actively used students' responses to fine-tune their teaching, producing, say the authors, "a cascade effect on both teacher and student learning, thus contributing to the development of classroom communities that treat students' ideas as legitimate resources for building knowledge…They formed narratives of being teachers who elicit, listen, and puzzle over how to build on students' tentative understandings of science ideas. The consolidation process of defining their essential roles as an educator helped them override contextual pressures to teach in conservative ways."

• *Third, using tools provided by university instructors* – "Taking up well-designed tools supported modifications to discourses and practices and helped novice teachers address vision-to-practice gaps," say the authors. The tools were a vital bridge between university theory and the tug of traditional practices in public schools, allowing the first group of novice teachers (and to a lesser degree the second) to develop a strong science-teaching repertoire.

What are the implications of this study for teacher training and induction? Imbue effective practices; provide practical tools that make it easier to implement those practices in the classroom; maintain ties with new teachers; and, most important, make sure teachers are

constantly using students' ideas and level of understanding to drive continuous improvement of teaching.

"Developing a Theory of Ambitious Early-Career Teacher Practice" by Jessica Thompson, Mark Windschitl, and Melissa Braaten in *American Educational Research Journal*, June 2013 (Vol. 50, #3, p. 574-615), http://bit.ly/10TGFih; Thompson can be reached at jjthomps@u.washington.edu.

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5. An Urban Secondary School Establishes a "Reading Culture"

In this *Teachers College Record* article, Chantal Francois (Rutgers University) describes the literacy practices of Grant Street School, a 560-student 6-12 inner-city school that had been mired in abysmally low reading achievement until it adopted balanced literacy practices in 2003, the most important being:

- 30 minutes of independent reading time every day in which students were encouraged to "lose themselves" in books;
- The expectation of up to one hour of independent reading after school hours;
- Beefing up the school library (to 11,000 books) and classroom libraries;
- Teachers recommending books to individual students, modeling their own enthusiasm for reading, monitoring students' reading, and making connections to all subject areas;
- Book clubs, discussion groups, and author visits;
- 15-25 percent of students' overall English grade based on progress in independent reading: quantity of books read (35 a year in grades 6-10 and 25 in grades 11-12), reading habits at home, engagement in class, and experimentation with genres and book difficulty.

The principal frequently visited classrooms and gave teachers feedback on their classroom practice, maintained a library in his office for students to use, attended literacy institutes with teachers, personally assessed students' reading development, and orchestrated weekly staff meetings by grade, discipline, and as a whole school to discuss instructional practices and students' progress. The result: Grant Street students' reading growth was two or three times that of their peers nationally and their reading motivation remained steady while most U.S. students' motivation declines during adolescence.

Francois uses the metaphor of a *crawl space* to describe what was happening during the independent reading time: "Just as a house's crawl space is a protected environment through which one can access pipes and other areas that are difficult to reach otherwise," she says, "Grant Street staff created a safe and protected space for students in reading that enabled them to attain a sense of community, individual agency, and reading development… My analysis suggests that a crawl space existed at Grant Street whereby students had enough breathing room to affirm themselves as readers in a community: they chose the books they wanted to read, formed relationships with each other and with adults about books, and apprenticed one another to read."

"Reading in the Crawl Space: A Study of an Urban School's Literacy-Focused Community of Practice" by Chantal Francois in *Teachers College Record*, May 2013 (Vol. 115, #5, p. 1-35), http://www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=16966

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6. Getting the Most Out of E-Books

"E-books have the potential to change the way our students read and consume text because of their interactivity and convenience," say Heather Ruetschlin Schugar, Carol Smith, and Jordan Schugar (West Chester University) in this helpful article in *The Reading Teacher*, But here's what a fourth grader said after finishing the e-book *Sir Charlie Stinky Socks and the Really Big Adventure*: "I have no clue what I just read." Why? Because he was so engaged making the wiggly woos howl and the good grey mare go "clippety clop" that he wasn't focusing on the meaning.

Clearly teachers need to proceed with caution when using e-books. Ruetschlin Schugar, Smith, and Schugar offer the following tips:

• *Familiarize students with the basics of their device*. Teachers shouldn't assume that students are savvy to all the skills necessary to get the most from an e-book. Some students need help turning the e-book or tablet on and off, accessing the necessary apps, orienting the screen, opening the e-book, turning pages, accessing interactive features, and setting expectations for how students should use the interactive features.

• *Model how to transfer skills they use when reading print*. These include bookmarking, annotating, highlighting, figuring out unfamiliar words, predicting, monitoring comprehension, using a dictionary, inferring, retelling, summarizing, and identifying main ideas.

• *Beware of gimmicks*. Many e-books allow students to touch pages to make sounds, move objects around, and access videos, games, and puzzles. Seductive as these features are, the authors say they don't always enhance comprehension. They recommend that teachers judge the value of e-book bells and whistles by asking these questions:

- Do the interactions provide support that would help the reader make a text-based inference or understand difficult vocabulary?
- Are there more supporting and extending interactions than distracting interactions?
- Are the interactions time-consuming, or are they relatively brief?
- How often are interactions used?
- Are they strategically placed to enhance motivation without distracting the reader from the meaning?
- Are the interactions within the text, or does the reader have to go to another screen?

Here are their suggestions for high-quality interactive picture books:

<u>For beginning readers</u>:

- *Blue Hat, Green Hat* by S. Boynton (Loud Crow)
- *Go Clifford, Go!* by N. Bridwell (Scholastic, 2010)
- *Meet Biscuit* by A.S. Capucilli (HarperCollins Children 2012)
- *Nickelby Swift, Kitten Catastrophe* by B. Hecht (VivaBook)
- *How Rocket Learned to Read* by T. Hills (Random House)

- *Miss Spider's Tea Party* by D. Kirk (Callaway Digital Arts)
- *A Fine Musician* by L. Thomson (Tokeru)

For fluent readers:

- *Will and Kate: A Love Story* by A. Larkum (Ink Robin)
- *Slice of Bread Goes to the Beach* by G. Mellenhorst (Jelly Biscuits)
- *Who Would Win? Killer Whale vs. Great White Shark* by J. Pallotta (Scholastic)
- *Wild About Books* by J. Sierra (Random House)
- *The Artifacts* by L. Stace and D. Hare (Happy Larry)

Even the best e-books are not perfect, and Schugar, Smith, and Schugar urge teachers to use them wisely.

• *Remember that an interactive e-book does not replace a good teacher*. The key is teacher selection of e-books and teacher scaffolding of the reading experience, say the authors: "We encourage teachers to provide guided instruction with interactive picture e-books through activating students' background knowledge before reading, prompting students to answer comprehension questions during reading, and helping students to extend their thinking about the text after reading."

"Teaching with Interactive Picture E-Books in Grades K-6" by Heather Ruetschlin Schugar, Carol Smith, and Jordan Schugar in *The Reading Teacher*, May 2013 (Vol. 66, #8, p. 615-624), http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/trtr.1168/abstract; the authors can be reached at hschugar@wcupa.edu, csmith3@wcupa.edu, and jschugar@wcupa.edu.

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7. Can Students Benefit from Success for All in Grades 3-5?

In this article in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Paul Hanselman and Geoffrey Borman (University of Wisconsin-Madison) evaluate the impact of Success for All literacy instruction in grades 3-5 for students who were not exposed to the program in grades K-2. Their conclusion: "In contrast to the early benefits, there is no effect on reading achievement in the later grades, either overall or for students and schools with high or low baseline reading achievement… The most important practical implication of these results is that Success for All may not be beneficial for students who are not exposed to the program before third grade."

"The Impacts of Success for All on Reading Achievement in Grades 3-5: Does Intervening During the Later Elementary Grades Produce the Same Benefits as Intervening Early?" by Paul Hanselman and Geoffrey Borman in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, June 2013 (Vol. 35, #2, p. 237-251), http://bit.ly/17jITic

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8. Are Most Kindergarten Students Spinning Their Wheels in Math?

In this article in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Mimi Engel (Vanderbilt University), Amy Claessens (University of Chicago), and Maida Finch (Salisbury University)

report on their study of the mathematics content taught in U.S. kindergarten classes and what students already know. Their conclusion: "Although the vast majority of children entered kindergarten having mastered basic counting and able to recognize simple geometric shapes, their teachers reported spending the most mathematics time – typically about 13 days per month – on this content." A small number of entering kindergarten students (about 5 percent) needed instruction on these basics, but the 95 percent of students who were already proficient students did not. In classrooms where students received instruction on more advanced material, they all benefited.

Why do so many kindergarten teachers spend time on material that almost all their students have already mastered? Engel, Claessens, and Finch suggest several possible reasons:

- Teachers may be less comfortable teaching math than reading.
- Teachers may have limited pedagogical content knowledge in math and stick with basic skills.
- Teachers may not be using assessments that inform them of children's entering skill levels.
- Teachers may be following district or state guidelines that emphasize basics over more-advanced content.

"Teaching Students What They Already Know? The (Mis)Alignment Between Mathematics Instructional Content and Student Knowledge in Kindergarten" by Mimi Engel, Amy Claessens, and Maida Finch in *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, June 2013 (Vol. 35, #2, p. 157-178), http://bit.ly/17TwQsV

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9. Which Students Get the Best Teachers?

In this *Teachers College Record* article, Thomas Luschei (Claremont Graduate University), Amita Chudgar (Michigan State University), and Joshua Rew (Florida State University) compare South Korea and Mexico on how teachers are placed in different types of secondary schools. It turns out that in South Korea, teachers with more experience and higher qualifications work more often with less-advantaged students, whereas in Mexico, the opposite is true. "We argue that these differences are due to both explicit policies and a greater commitment to educational equity in South Korea, relative to Mexico," conclude the authors. They note that the United States is more like Mexico than South Korea on this dimension of educational equity.

"Exploring Differences in the Distribution of Teacher Qualifications Across Mexico and South Korea: Evidence from the Teaching and Learning International Survey" by Thomas Luschei, Amita Chudgar, and Joshua Rew in *Teachers College Record*, May 2013 (Vol. 115, #5, p. 1-38), http://www.tcrecord.org/library/abstract.asp?contentid=16964

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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 42 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).

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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
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 Update/Curriculum Update
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 Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
NASSP Journal
NJEA Review
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
Teacher
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
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
Wharton Leadership Digest