

Marshall Memo 522

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

February 3, 2014

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Quotes of the Week

“In this high-stress educational climate, separating the fixed mindset of high-stakes assessments as a vehicle to rate and demoralize teachers from the growth mindset of using assessments for learning may seem like an arduous task.”

Lucille McAssey (see item #3)

“How can teachers be enabled to collect evidence of student learning that captures the most important goals they are pursuing, and then to analyze and reflect on this evidence – individually and collectively – to continually improve their teaching?”

Linda Darling-Hammond (see item #4)

“The more you are immersed in the past, the less able you will be to move on to the future, as anyone knows who has ever been in a failed romantic relationship.”

Robert Sternberg (see item #1)

“The main characteristic that makes people successful is not their IQ, emotional intelligence, or even creativity. It is their resilience in the face of what seem to be insurmountable obstacles.”

Robert Sternberg (*ibid.*)

“People interviewing you for a job will be at least as interested in how you responded to a crisis, and what you learned from it, as they are in the actual details.”

Robert Sternberg (*ibid.*)

“Students think that learning can happen a lot faster than it does... They think they can get what they need out of a chapter with one quick read through (electronic devices at the ready, snacks in hand, and ears flooded with music).”

Maryellen Weimer (see item #5)

1. Recovering from a Professional Failure

In this candid and helpful article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Robert Sternberg recalls three crises in his professional career. The first was when Sternberg, age 28, made a fool of himself by using what seemed like an offer from another university to get considered for early tenure in his current job, only to find out that the offer wasn't serious. "I was so humiliated that I felt like disappearing down a rabbit hole, if only I could have found a convenient one," he says. The second crisis was when he was 54 and a company paying for a successful research project refused to renew the grant, pulling the rug out from under him and his colleagues. "I was ready once again to jump down a rabbit hole," he says. "Where are those rabbit holes when you need them?" The third was just a few months ago, when at age 63 he accepted a job as president of the University of Wyoming and quickly found that his values and beliefs were "a terrible fit" with the university. He resigned after only four months.

Sternberg landed on his feet after each of these situations and has had a successful career. He has these suggestions for others when they hit a rough patch:

- *Realize you are not alone.* "No matter how bad the crisis, someone else has experienced almost the same thing, and probably worse than you have," he says. "If you can find people who have had a similar crisis to your own, talk with them."

- *Be resilient, not just smart.* "The main characteristic that makes people successful is not their IQ, emotional intelligence, or even creativity," says Sternberg. "It is their resilience in the face of what seem to be insurmountable obstacles." He has seen many colleagues give up after personal or professional setbacks (divorce, illness, a debilitating accident, loss of grant money, tenure denial), but he didn't.

- *Most of the time, it's not about you.* At one point Sternberg took it personally that his grant proposals were being rejected, but then he spoke to a more-successful grant writer and found that his rejection rate was about the same. "When my university presidency was on the verge of catastrophe, I felt like a failure until I realized that I just didn't see the world in the same way as some of my constituents did," he says. "They were entitled to their worldview, but I was also entitled to mine."

- *Learn from the experience.* Each of Sternberg's setbacks taught him an important lesson, and he believes that's helped him bounce back and find other successful pathways: "People interviewing you for a job will be at least as interested in how you responded to a crisis, and what you learned from it, as they are in the actual details."

- *Seek out a support network to help you move on.* “You may think you can move on by yourself,” he says, “but you can do so much more effectively if you have other people working with, or even for, you.”

- *Use any downtime you have to do something you really enjoy.* “You will need energy to renew yourself professionally, and that energy has to come from somewhere,” says Sternberg. “It might as well come from doing something you love.”

- *Think twice before striking back, especially with a lawsuit.* “Your cause may be just,” he says. “But the more relevant question is whether plotting your revenge is the best use of your time, energy, reputation, and likely, money. Wouldn’t it be wiser to focus on plotting a new future for yourself?”

- *Don’t hide.* The more humiliating a crisis is, the more you want to disappear, he says. “Don’t. You need to reaffirm for people, and perhaps for yourself, who you are and what you stand for.” It’s important to show that the crisis has not destroyed you – that you have what it takes to overcome obstacles in your path.

- *View the crisis as an opportunity.* It almost always is, so don’t waste it. In each of Sternberg’s setbacks, new pathways presented themselves and his career went in new directions. After his latest setback, he returned to the teaching and research he loved.

- *Move on.* “The more you are immersed in the past, the less able you will be to move on to the future, as anyone knows who has ever been in a failed romantic relationship,” concludes Sternberg. “So put the crisis behind you. The future awaits.”

“Coping with a Career Crisis” by Robert Sternberg in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jan. 31, 2014 (Vol. LX, #20, p. A28-A29), <http://chronicle.com/article/Coping-With-a-Career-Crisis/144191/>

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2. Getting Preschool Right

In this *New York Times* Op-Ed article (one of three on this topic that day), Daniel Willingham and David Grissmer (University of Virginia) question what political leaders like President Obama and New York City Mayor de Blasio mean when they confidently assert that preschool education “works.” Given that low-SES children enter kindergarten 8-10 months behind their high-SES peers, what do effective preschools accomplish? The models most often cited are the Abecedarian and Perry programs from the 1960s and 1970s – their graduates went further in school and, decades later, had better jobs than children from similar backgrounds who did not attend high-quality preschool. From those programs and subsequent research, we know that:

- High-quality programs are expensive.
- Focusing on social activities in preschool (as Head Start does) yields minimal long-term academic effects.
- Trying to teach kindergarten-level reading and math to 4-year-olds doesn’t work.

“The preschools that do work teach less well-prepared kids precursor skills,” say Willingham and Grissmer, “the kind that many wealthy kids learn at home, through activities that don’t look especially academic.”

Researchers don't have a definitive list, but the evidence so far points to the following: songs and rhyming games that help children understand that words are made up of individual sounds; early math skills in programs like "Building Blocks"; jigsaw puzzles and other games that strengthen spatial skills; gaining knowledge about the world; and learning impulse control and self-discipline through household rules – all this in a warm emotional climate.

What's less clear is how a good preschool curriculum and trained teachers interact with parenting, nutrition, sleep, and other aspects of domestic life. To learn more, Willingham and Grissmer propose a national study involving as many as 15,000 children to sort out what really works. "Helping poor children succeed will not be easy," they conclude, "and we'd be fools to think we'll get this right the first time. We need the tools of science to help plan course corrections, which means planning policies so that both scientists and teachers can learn on the job."

"How to Get More Early Bloomers" by Daniel Willingham and David Grissmer in *The New York Times*, Jan. 30, 2014,

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/30/opinion/how-to-get-more-early-bloomers.html?_r=0

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3. Weathering the "Perfect Storm" of Curriculum and Testing

In this article in *Principal Magazine*, Long Island, New York principal Lucille McAssey offers advice on how to deal with the triple threat of demanding Common Core State Standards (CCSS), high-stakes student tests, and new teacher and principal evaluation policies in her state. "The teachers and administrators in our district understand that CCSS and assessments are necessary to prepare our children for college- and career-readiness in a global market," says McAssey. But she is concerned about the "rushed" implementation of the initiatives, the length of time students have to sit for state tests (longer than most professional licensing and certification exams, she says), the shortage of well-aligned curriculum materials, and the use of student test scores as part of teachers' and principals' evaluations.

"In this high-stress educational climate, separating the fixed mindset of high-stakes assessments as a vehicle to rate and demoralize teachers from the growth mindset of using assessments for learning may seem like an arduous task," she says. Here's her advice on how to proceed:

- *Understand assessments.* It's essential to use formative assessments to help students and teachers know how things are going during the school year and improve performance. Even better is getting students to understand their assessment data and develop more and more self-confidence and motivation to learn. And parents need to learn about the new standards and the tests that will be used to assess their children.

- *Use multiple data sources.* These include individual reading assessments, writing samples, classroom assessments, portfolios, and teacher observation data. A key step is giving teacher teams "time to meet regularly to carefully examine assessment data, set goals, share and create lessons, develop common formative assessments, and review student work..." says McAssey. Her school discovered a provision in the teacher contract that allowed after-school

meetings the second Monday of every month. “Teachers welcomed this additional meeting time as another opportunity to work collaboratively toward our goal to continuously improve student learning,” she says.

- *Make good use of technology.* McAssey’s staff have access to “on demand” staff development modules, computer-adaptive reading and math programs, Moodle for collaborative book clubs and virtual field trips, classroom clickers for immediate feedback from students, and document cameras.

- *Provide tiered levels of student support.* McAssey advocates using Response to Intervention to provide intensive help for students who don’t achieve mastery after initial instruction. “Four to six weeks of progress monitoring provides additional data to determine what programs and methodologies are working and what needs to be changed,” she says.

“Common Core Assessments: A Principal’s View” by Lucille McAssey in *Principal Magazine*, January/February 2014 (Vol. 93, #3, p. 14-18), <http://bit.ly/1aXBxEi>

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4. Linda Darling-Hammond on Effective Use of Local Assessments

In this important article in *Principal Magazine*, Linda Darling-Hammond (Stanford University) says the Common Core State Standards “offer an opportunity to pivot toward a richer and more rigorous system of assessment.” The forthcoming PARCC and Smarter Balanced tests need to be supplemented, she believes, by local assessments that contain:

- Classroom-administered performance tasks such as research papers, science investigations, mathematical solutions, engineering designs, and arts performances;
- Portfolios of writing samples, art works, and other learning products;
- Oral presentations and scored discussions;
- Teacher rating of student note-taking skills, collaboration, persistence with challenging tasks, and other evidence of skill acquisition.

When teachers use high-quality local assessments, says Darling-Hammond, they “become expert in their practice and more attuned to how students think and learn.”

Darling-Hammond believes these assessments can be part of a “basket of evidence about student learning” that can play a part in the evaluation of teachers – along with supervisors’ classroom observations and judgments of teachers’ professional contributions. She says this is a far better approach than value-added data on state standardized tests, which are “particularly problematic” when used to judge individual teachers: “In addition to the fact that the tests are narrow and do not measure higher-order thinking skills, researchers have found that value-added models of teacher effectiveness are highly unstable: Teachers’ ratings differ substantially from class to class and from year to year, as well as from one test to the next... In particular, teachers with large numbers of new English learners and other students with special needs have been found to show lower gains than the same teachers when they are teaching other students.”

To illustrate the vagaries of value-added teacher evaluation, Darling-Hammond tells what happened to Carolyn Abbott, a grade 7-8 New York City math teacher. In 2010, Abbott’s

seventh graders (who were classified as gifted) scored an average of 98th percentile on the city's math test; many could go no higher. When she looped with those students to eighth grade the next year, every student passed the 10th-grade New York Regents test, one-third with perfect scores. But because New York's value-added formula emphasized growth on the city's math test, Abbott's rating was the lowest of any eighth-grade math teacher in the city. Beloved by students and parents and praised by her principal, Abbott was excused and left the district for a Ph.D. program.

The alternative to this kind of foolishness, says Darling-Hammond, "is to develop a basket of evidence about student learning that is appropriate for the curriculum and the students being taught." In Abbott's case, this would have included her students' scores on the 10th-grade Regents test, perhaps accompanied by a pre-test to measure growth in those and other curriculum areas during the year. "This would inform the entire teacher team working on the projects together," says Darling-Hammond.

She closes with four questions that principals should be asking themselves as the Common Core era begins:

- "How can we engage students in assessments that measure higher-order thinking and performance skills – and use these to transform practice?"
- How can these assessments be used to help students become independent learners, and help teachers learn about how their students learn?
- How can teachers be enabled to collect evidence of student learning that captures the most important goals they are pursuing, and then to analyze and reflect on this evidence – individually and collectively – to continually improve their teaching?
- What is the range of measures we believe could capture the educational goals we care about in our school? How could we use these to illustrate and extend our progress and successes as a school?"

"Testing To, and Beyond, the Common Core" by Linda Darling-Hammond in *Principal Magazine*, January/February 2014 (Vol. 93, #3, p. 8-12), <http://bit.ly/1fCovvo>

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5. Four Student Misconceptions About Studying and Learning

In this article in *Faculty Focus*, Maryellen Weimer (Penn State University) draws on the work of Stephen Chew to highlight four common beliefs that undermine college students' efforts to learn [also true for many K-12 students]:

- *Misconception #1: Learning is fast.* "Students think that learning can happen a lot faster than it does," says Weimer. "They think they can get what they need out of a chapter with one quick read through (electronic devices at the ready, snacks in hand, and ears flooded with music)." Student need to be taught how to interact with materials in ways that make learning sink in.

- *Misconception #2: Knowledge is composed of isolated facts.* When students use flash cards with only one term or concept per card, they memorize definitions but often fail to grasp higher-level concepts. Teachers should use test questions that ask students to relate definitions,

use them to construct arguments, and apply them to new situations, and then work with students to modify their study techniques.

- *Misconception #3: Doing well academically is a matter of inborn talent.* “All of us have had students who tell us with great assurance that they can’t write, can’t do math, are horrible at science, or have no artistic ability,” says Weimer. Students who think this way don’t try as hard in weak areas and give up when they encounter difficulty. Teachers’ feedback is very important to getting these students to shift from a “fixed” to a “growth” mindset and to see that effort and strategy are the key variables in achievement.

- *Misconception #4: Look Ma, I’m multi-tasking.* The evidence is clear that the brain can’t simultaneously handle more than one cognitively demanding task, says Weimer. People who think they are successfully multitasking are in fact missing important information – and they don’t even realize it. Since many students won’t take our word for it, a demonstration may be necessary to prove the point.

“Four Student Misconceptions About Learning” by Maryellen Weimer in *Faculty Focus*, Jan. 29, 2014, <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/four-student-misconceptions-learning/>

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6. Tweaking a Competitive Review Game to Include All Students

In this thoughtful article in *AMLE Magazine*, Melissa Marks (University of Pittsburgh/Greensburg) describes how much her students enjoyed playing competitive review games when she was a middle-school teacher. But one year, an eighth-grade girl refused to take part in the games, and after class broke down in tears and told Marks that other students called her “stupid” and taunted her when she didn’t get points for her team (“That was *so* easy”). Other teachers suggested putting an end to competitive games or having the girl serve as a helper, but Marks hit upon a different solution: allowing groups of students to work together, thus removing the pressure to answer individually. With student input, she shaped a new review game that was dubbed The Betting Game by students. Here’s how it works.

- Students sit in mixed groups of 3-5.
- Each group gets \$100 in play money (or 100 points) to bet with.
- Group members must agree on the amount of each bet (whole numbers only), otherwise the group forfeits the round.
- The teacher writes several answers on the board, each one corresponding to a physical motion – for example, in a social studies class:
 - Raise one hand – Freedom of speech
 - Raise two hands – No unreasonable search and seizure
 - Raise one foot – Freedom of the press
 - Raise two feet – Right to a speedy and public trial
 - Stand up – End of involuntary servitude
- The teacher asks the class, “Which of these is not part of the Bill of Rights?”
- Students discuss within their group, taking as long as necessary to reach agreement.

- When the teacher says, “Go!” students all perform the motion corresponding to their answer choice.
- Groups that answer correctly add their wager to their score; those that answer incorrectly have their wager deducted.
- If any student makes a movement that differs from the rest of the group, the whole group is docked the amount of their wager.
- If some groups start falling way behind, the teacher might decide to have a bonus round with a different type of question – for example, students write as many parts of speech as they can within one minute and get five points for each correct answer. This rapidly racks up points and makes the game more evenly matched.

Marks says the Betting Game has been successful all the way from third grade to university classes because it encourages cooperation and peer learning, brings together diverse groups of students (she regularly rotates the groups), involves physical movement, and allows review of important material in a fun context. The eighth-grade girl who was so reluctant to play the previous type of competitive review game liked this format much better, saying that other students did a much better job explaining things than Marks did. “To me, this was as good as it gets,” says Marks.

“All Bets On: A Cooperative Review Game” by Melissa Marks in *AMLE Magazine*, January 2014 (Vol. 1, #5, p. 18-20), www.amle.org; Marks can be reached at mjm37@pitt.edu.

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7. Effective Use of Primary Documents in Middle School Social Studies

In this article in *AMLE Magazine*, Kenneth Anthony and Nicole Miller (Mississippi State University) say the Common Core ELA standards “provide a natural way for language arts and social studies teachers to collaborate through interdisciplinary teaching; the medium for collaboration can be primary sources.” Anthony and Miller suggest a three-pronged approach to using primary documents to deepen students’ understanding:

- *Consider the context.* Students establish a baseline by answering questions such as, When was this document written? Why was it written? Who authored this document? What was the author’s point of view? (judged by the tone and the presence or absence of particular information)

- *Consider the content.* What was said? What arguments were made? What supporting points or details were provided? These questions deepen students’ understanding of the document, key vocabulary, central ideas, text structure, and the topic being studied.

- *Make connections.* Guiding questions include: What connections to your life and/or prior learning can you make? What connections to other events and people in history can you make?

Anthony and Miller suggest the primary document “Rationale for Founding the Georgia Colony” for middle-school social studies classes, using it to find this information:

- *Geography:* the location of Georgia in relation to existing colonies; the distance from England to Georgia; how long it took to travel; the boundaries of the colony; the

location and significance of Great Britain, China, Persia, Bahamas, Palestine, Port Royal;

- *People*: His majesty the king of England, James Oglethorpe, William Penn, Indians, Protestants, Saltzburghers, “the useless Poor in England.”
- *Economics*: Money for passage, sustenance, revenue, duties on goods.
- *Domain-specific vocabulary*: Colony, charter, persecution, trustees, incorporating, latitude.
- *Domain-specific concepts*: Liberty of conscience, refuge from persecution.
- *Time*: When was the Colony of Georgia established compared to the other British colonies in North America?
- *Time, continuity, and change*: What events influenced the development of Georgia and the United States?
- *Power, authority, and governance*: How and why do political systems protect individual rights? How does this document compare to the Mayflower Compact and the Declaration of Independence?
- *Civic ideals*: How and why did the United States develop democratic ideas and practices?
- *People, places, and environments*: Why did people leave Europe for America? How does the establishment of Georgia differ from other colonies?

“Digging Deeper with Primary Sources” by Kenneth Anthony and Nicole Miller in *AMLE Magazine*, January 2014 (Vol. 1, #5, p. 23-25), www.ample.org; the authors can be reached at kva3@msstate.edu and ncm39@colled.msstate.edu.

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8. Making Idioms Comprehensible to English Language Learners

In this article in *AMLE Magazine*, Melanie Greene and Grayson Chell (Appalachian State University/Boone) say that many American idioms are incomprehensible to English language learners. Consider baseball expressions that a teacher might use without a second thought:

- We’re setting the ground rules.
- Play ball!
- Who’s at bat?
- Are you ready to step up to the plate?
- He’s a real rookie.
- Touch base with her.
- Can you be the pinch hitter?
- Looks like you dropped the ball.
- You’re way off base.
- That’s two strikes. If you get three, you’re outa here.
- Wind up for the pitch.
- Brush him off.

- Ted hit it out of the ballpark!
- It's a home run!

Hearing all this, say the authors, ELLs might “be so busy trying to determine where the ball was, who was up at bat, and who hit a home run that they miss the key concepts of the lesson.”

The Common Core ELA standards expect students to master figurative language, word relationships, and nuances of word meaning, but students shouldn't be expected to pick up these concepts “on the fly.” Here are some strategies to teach idioms more systematically:

- Introduce idioms in context, never in isolation. Show students how idioms are used in newspaper and magazine articles, songs, cartoons, videos, and advertisements. Another approach is to use the idiom in a conversation and ask students to try to figure out the meaning.

- Have students use idioms in conversation. Pairs of students might be asked to write a conversation using idioms and then perform it for the class.

- Make sure students understand. Many idioms are used in informal spoken exchanges, not in writing.

- Practice with games and activities. These are good ways to engage students and help them internalize idiomatic meanings. Here are some helpful websites:

- Busy Teacher: <http://busyteacher.org/3712-how-to-teach-english-idioms-and-their-meaning.html>
- StickyBall: www.stickyball.net/idioms.html
- Activities for ESL students: <http://a4esl.org/q/h/9801/lk-idiomsp.html>
- Using English: www.usingenglish.com/reference/idioms
- ESL Mania: www.eslmania.com

“Using Idioms with English Language Learners” by Melanie Greene and Grayson Chell in *AMLE Magazine*, January 2014 (Vol. 1, #5, p. 21-22), www.amle.org; the authors can be reached at greenemw@appstate.edu and chellgl@email.appstate.edu.

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9. Children's Second Language Acquisition

This research brief in *Principal Magazine* reports on a University of Houston study of children learning a completely new language (Hungarian). The researchers found that some students were better than others at learning the sounds of the new language, regardless of whether they were bilingual. “That was an eye-opener for me because I feel like now we are starting to find different factors that predict the ability to learn different things,” says Arturo Hernandez, one of the authors. “I would hope the results of this research would allow us to dramatically change the time at which we introduce a second language and the method that we use, such as a stronger emphasis on learning the sounds of a language rather than learning vocabulary and memorizing it for a test.”

“New Keys to Language Acquisition” in *Principal Magazine*, January/February 2014 (Vol. 93, #3, p. 6-7), https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/Snapshots_JF14.pdf; the original study was published in the February 2013 issue of *NeuroImage*.

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10. Short Item:

Spanish and French websites – These two websites are recommended in *The Language Educator*:

- Spanish Playground www.spanishplayground.net has curriculum resources including videos, activities, games, songs, crafts, poems, and stories.
- This site www.atilf.fr has information about research on computer processing and analysis of the French language

“WebWatch” in *The Language Educator*, January 2014 (Vol. 9, #1, p. 61)

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall48@gmail.com

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 43 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

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

Subscriptions:

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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/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
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 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
School Library Journal
Teacher
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The 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