Marshall Memo 484

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
May 6, 2013

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"[T]he Internet is a digital river that carries incredible sources of wisdom and hate along the same current. It's all there together. And our kids and citizens usually interact with this flow nakedly, with no supervision."

Thomas Friedman (see item #1)

"A very learned man may profoundly understand a subject himself, and yet fail egregiously in elucidating it to others."

A 1861 petition to the California Superintendent of Public Instruction (see item #5)

"Habit, teachers, and even our best intentions often act as stealth saboteurs of ingenuity."

A sub-headline to article #4

"Never withhold recess from students for a disciplinary issue; there are countless other ways to let them know they behaved inappropriately."

Eric Jensen (see item #2)

"This language difference is not subtle; it's a mind-boggling, jaw-dropping cognitive chasm."

Eric Jensen on the 33 million-word gap between poor and affluent 4-year-olds (item #1)

"Goal-setting and planning are learned skills crucial to success in almost any area. Educators who stare down poverty don't assume students come equipped with those skills."

Carol Ann Tomlinson (see item #3)

1. Thomas Friedman on Filtering the Internet

In this powerful *New York Times* column, Thomas Friedman comments on the "self-radicalization" of the alleged Boston Marathon bombers, courtesy of Internet postings by radical jihadists. "[I]t is another reminder that the Internet is a digital river that carries incredible sources of wisdom and hate along the same current," says Friedman. "It's all there together. And our kids and citizens usually interact with this flow nakedly, with no supervision… As such, it is more important than ever that we build the internal software, the internal filters, into every citizen to sift out fact from fiction in this electronic torrent, which offers so much information that has never been touched by an editor, a censor, or a libel lawyer."

Modems sold in America should come with a warning label from the Surgeon General, he says: *Attention: Judgment not included*. The more sophisticated and high-speed the Internet becomes, the more the basics matter: "good judgment, respect for others who are different, and basic values of right and wrong. Those you can't download," says Friedman. "They have to be uploaded, the old-fashioned way, by parents around the dinner table, by caring but demanding teachers at school, and by responsible spiritual leaders in a church, synagogue, temple, or mosque."

"Judgment Not Included" by Thomas Friedman in *The New York Times*, Apr. 28, 2013 (p. SR11), http://nyti.ms/167yAgb

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2. Helping the Children of Poverty Succeed in School

(Originally titled "How Poverty Affects Classroom Engagement")

In this helpful article in *Educational Leadership*, author Eric Jensen lists seven reasons children from low-income households find it more difficult to be engaged in school – and what educators can do:

• *Health and nutrition* – "Overall, poor people are less likely to exercise, get proper diagnoses, receive appropriate and prompt medical attention, or be prescribed appropriate medications or interventions," says Jensen. There are more untreated ear infections, greater exposure to lead, a higher incidence of asthma, and less nutritious food – all of which affects attention, reasoning, memory, learning, and behavior. *Action steps*: Make sure students get breakfast, recess, physical education, games, movement, drama, and yoga, all of which boost the level of oxygen and glucose in the brain and fuel learning. "Never withhold recess from

students for a disciplinary issue," says Jensen; "there are countless other ways to let them know they behaved inappropriately."

• *Vocabulary* – Children from low-income homes hear 13 million total spoken words by age 4, compared to 46 million words heard by upper-income children. "This language difference is not subtle," says Jensen; "it's a mind-boggling, jaw-dropping cognitive chasm. A child's vocabulary is part of the brain's tool kit for learning, memory, and cognition. Words help children represent, manipulate, and reframe information." *Action steps:* Vocabulary building must be a daily, relentless part of instruction, using multiple approaches to strengthen knowledge and understanding of well-chosen words.

• *Effort* – Unsophisticated educators often characterize poor children as "lazy," but what they're seeing is lost hope and incipient depression. "Students who show little or no effort are simply giving you feedback," says Jensen. *Action steps*: "Effort can be taught, and strong teachers do this every day," he says. Build relationships with students; introduce novelty, excitement, and competition into learning activities; make connections between the curriculum and students' everyday lives; give more positive comments than negative; set high goals and motivate students to meet them; show them real-world success stories of adults who came from similar circumstances; and give daily feedback so students see that effort matters.

• *Hope and the growth mindset* – One characteristic of poverty is learned helplessness. Another is a negative, "fixed" view of intelligence. Both sap motivation to try hard in school. *Action steps*: "Teach students that their brains can change and grow, that they can even raise their IQs," says Jensen. "Don't use comforting phrases that imply that even though a student isn't good at something, he or she has 'other' strengths." In addition, provide feedback that is prompt, actionable, and task-specific, spurring students to try hard.

• *Cognition* – "Commonly, low-SES children show cognitive problems, including short attention spans, high levels of distractibility, difficulty monitoring the quality of their work, and difficulty generating new solutions to problems," says Jensen. These deficits may lead students to act out or shut down. *Action steps:* "Like effort, cognitive capacity is teachable," he says. "Focus on the core academic skills that students need the most." These include how to organize, study, take notes, prioritize, remember key ideas, problem-solve, process, and build working memory. "This will take tons of encouragement, positive feedback, and persistence."

• *Relationships* – "When children's early experiences are chaotic and one or both of the parents are absent, the developing brain often becomes insecure and stressed," says Jensen. Stressed parents and caregivers are more often grumpy, and children can get twice as many reprimands as positive comments (compared to the 3:1 positive/negative ratio middle-class children typically receive). Poor parents are less likely to have the resources to deal with ADHD, dyslexia, or oppositional behavior. *Action steps*: Children from such homes need positive, caring adults in school – teachers and other staff members who get to know them well (family, hobbies, interests), are wise enough not to embarrass them in front of their peers, and teach them appropriate social and emotional responses – "When you think your teacher has overstepped his or her bounds, this is what you should say" and "This will keep you out of trouble with other adults."

• *Distress* – Acute, chronic stress is toxic, and children living in poverty have more than their share. "Distress affects brain development, academic success, and social competence," says Jensen. "It also impairs behaviors; reduces attentional control; boosts impulsivity; and impairs working memory." Common symptoms are in-your-face assertiveness or leave-me-alone passivity. "To the uninformed, the student may appear to be either out of control, showing an attitude, or lazy. But those behaviors are actually symptoms of stress disorders…" *Action steps*: If teachers address the real issue, the symptoms will diminish. Building strong relationships is the starting point. Getting students to articulate what is stressing them out is also helpful, as is teaching them coping skills – for example, an if-this-then-that strategy for solving problems. Making learning fun is key, as is giving students more control over learning – gradual release of responsibility – versus trying to control them. "Having a sense of control is the fundamental element that helps diminish the effects of chronic and acute stress," says Jensen.

"How Poverty Affects Classroom Engagement" by Eric Jensen in *Educational Leadership*, May 2013 (Vol. 70, #8, p. 24-30), www.ascd.org; Jensen can be reached at info@jlcbrain.com.

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3. Carol Ann Tomlinson on Teachers Who Make a Difference

(Originally titled "Teachers Who Stare Down Poverty")

In this thoughtful article in *Educational Leadership*, differentiation guru Carol Ann Tomlinson describes how some remarkable teachers succeed with the children of poverty:

• *Believe* – These educators "accept as a given that there are few limits on what individuals can accomplish through hard, savvy work," says Tomlinson.

• *Respect* – They "[s]ee richness in the lives, experiences, and cultures of youth they mentor."

• *Connect* – They embrace a young person's worth, even when the child pushes them away.

• *Stretch horizons* – They orchestrate experiences that expand the child's sense of possibility – a computer camp, a play, a choir.

• *Set targets* – "Goal-setting and planning are learned skills crucial to success in almost any area," says Tomlinson. "Educators who stare down poverty don't assume students come equipped with those skills."

• *Build skills* – These might include reading, writing, public speaking, applying for college, being assertive.

• *Live in two worlds* – "Often the invitation to build a dream is an invitation to move into a different circle of life," says Tomlinson. "Teachers must help young people become bicultural… and deal with the accompanying emotional tensions."

• *Build networks* – "It's lonely to have aspirations that set you apart from friends," she says. Effective teachers connect students with like-minded peers and supportive adults.

• *Hang in there* – "These mentor-educators accept that the students whom they champion at age 10 will still need their support at 16," Tomlinson concludes. "When failures happen, they help the student refocus, regroup, and restart."

"Teachers Who Stare Down Poverty" by Carol Ann Tomlinson in *Educational Leadership*, May 2013 (Vol. 70, #8, p. 88-89), www.ascd.org; Tomlinson can be reached at cat3y@virginia.edu.

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4. Insights on Creativity

"Habit, teachers, and even our best intentions often act as stealth saboteurs of ingenuity," says the headline for this collection of articles in *Psychology Today*. "Yet awareness of the forces that blunt creativity can nurture the innovator within." Here are the big ideas:

• *Fear of failure narrows vision*. Being supervised and evaluated improves performance on physically demanding tasks (lifting weights) or tedious tasks (counting beans), says Peter Gray (Boston College). "But in tasks that require creativity, new insights, or learning, we do better when we are not being evaluated, so are not afraid of failure," he says. In one experiment, people were asked to produce a poem, collage, or short story. Some were told their products would be evaluated by a panel of experts, some were told their creations would be entered into a contest with prizes, and some were told nothing. Those in the third group consistently produced the most creative products. Why? "They were just playing, not concerned about judgments or rewards," says Gray. "It's no wonder children are less creative when classrooms are centered on evaluation… Feedback generally promotes effort – because we want to impress the evaluator – but effort is insufficient for creativity. We can't be more creative just by trying harder. We must relax in a way that permits the full engagement of unconscious mental processes – the ones that generate unusual associations and new ideas. These work best when we are playing, not when we are striving for praise or a reward."

• *Concentration can kill creativity*. Paradoxically, focusing too intently on a problem is not the best way to get creative juices flowing, says Sian Beilock (University of Chicago). A classic example is the story of Archimedes's eureka moment as he got into a bath and water spilled out – he made the connection to displaced water and how he could tell if the king's crown was made of solid gold. "When you're stuck on a problem that needs a creative solution," says Beilock, "doing something that doesn't require too much mental effort helps you connect your thoughts in new and unusual ways… Research suggests that moving freely – walking outdoors, pacing around the room, or even gesturing with one hand and then the other – triggers the free flow of ideas needed for creative breakthroughs."

• *Boredom is the imagination's playground*. When we're doing something boring and repetitious (like swimming laps), our mind "revisits experiences, scans for opportunities, plays with problems," says author Peter Bregman, "and that's when creativity comes alive." The problem is that all our gadgets keep our minds occupied 24/7 and we don't experience boredom nearly enough. "When was the last time you rode an elevator and didn't pull out your

phone?" he asks. "Every free moment has become an opportunity to get something done, or at least to be entertained. But doing *nothing*, being bored, is a precious thing… It's amazing what a little boredom can create."

• *Other people's ideas often spark our own best inventions*. "In practice, creativity is a cumulative process, one that often involves tweaking, adapting, and melding existing creations," say Christopher Sprigman (University of Virginia School of Law) and Kal Raustiala (UCLA). "Older works are often the building blocks of new ones." People tend to be optimistic about the success of their inventions and creations, and this spurs innovation. Perhaps it would be better, say Sprigman and Raustiala, if copyright and patent laws had shorter time horizons.

• *Renaming known problems boosts creativity*. "When you ask most people to do something creative, they quickly get stuck in a rut," says Art Markman (University of Texas). Asked to draw animals from an alien planet, for example, most people draw animals with many similarities to those on Earth. "If you want to change the way you approach a creative problem, then you need to change what you are thinking about," he argues. "You need to describe the situation in a new way. That will change what you pull from your memory and the knowledge you use to solve the problem." The best way to do that is to think about the essence of the problem, looking for another way to frame that issue. What kind of life forms would live on a planet with a completely different environment? "So don't think differently," says Markman. "Think about different things."

"The Enemies of Invention" by Art Markman, Peter Gray, Sian Beilock, Christopher Sprigman and Kal Raustiala, and Peter Bregman in *Psychology Today*, May/June 2013 (Vol. 46, #3, p. 78-86), www.psychologytoday.com

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5. What Pedagogical Content Knowledge Looks Like in History Classrooms

In this article in *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, Chauncey Monte-Sano (University of Michigan) and Christopher Budano (University of Maryland) quote an 1861 petition to the California Superintendent of Public Instruction: "A very learned man may profoundly understand a subject himself, and yet fail egregiously in elucidating it to others." The missing ingredient, in modern lingo, was *pedagogical content knowledge* – knowing how to represent and convey subject matter in ways that make it comprehensible to students. Part of that is understanding what makes the content easy or difficult. "Such knowledge enables teachers to work in the spaces in which teaching, content, and students interact," say Monte-Sano and Budano.

The authors studied two novice high-school history teachers, Talia and Gabrielle, as they developed as instructors during university training and their first two years in the classroom. Here is how Monte-Sano and Budano broke down pedagogical content knowledge in history:

• *Representing history* – The ways in which teachers communicate what history involves: the nature of historical knowledge, the structure of history as a discipline, historical

ways of thinking, and the work of historians. In the classroom:

- Using an activity or task structure that allows for inquiry or interpretive thinking;
- Selecting documents that are generative and suited to the goals and topic of the lesson;
- Crafting inquiry questions to guide historical analysis of documents;
- Identifying multiple documents that work together and support inquiry;
- Asking questions that call for analysis and historical thinking.

For example, Talia showed students an image of Marie Antoinette's and Louis XVI's severed heads and asked, "Why would people want to cut off their heads?" Students then studied a set of documents on the causes of the French Revolution.

• *Transforming history* – How teachers transform historical content into lessons and materials that develop students' historical understanding and thinking and give students appropriate opportunities to learn the content. In the classroom:

- Modeling the analysis of documents to make expert thinking visible;
- Guiding students' analysis using questions, graphic organizers, feedback, etc.;
- Modeling and guiding the overall process of writing as well as particular skills associated with writing history;
- Using organizational structures that give students opportunities to rely on one another for support as they investigate;
- Shortening and editing documents so they are manageable for students.

For example, Talia had students analyze a political cartoon in which an old person representing the Third Estate was carrying the other estates on his back. Students then looked at other documents on the causes of the French Revolution.

• *Attending to students' ideas about history* – How teachers focus on and respond to students' thinking about history and build on their incoming ideas and experiences, address misconceptions, further develop their understanding, and promote historical ways of thinking. In the classroom:

- Noticing students' disciplinary thinking;
- Identifying and building on students' prior experiences to facilitate new learning;
- Recognizing strengths and weaknesses in students' thinking, particularly what is easy and what is difficult for them in learning a topic or skill;
- Revising or redirecting teaching to support students' learning of concepts and ways of thinking.

This proved the most challenging aspect of pedagogical content knowledge for the two teachers. For example, Talia noticed that her students struggled with analyzing documents, especially recognizing authorship. Students also tended to assume all documents were factual.

• *Framing history* – How teachers select and arrange topics into a coherent story that conveys cause-and-effect relationships between and among events as well as the historical significance of events and people. In the classroom:

- Selecting historically significant and thematically related topics to include in lessons.
- Selecting topics for instruction and making cause-and-effect relationships apparent;
- Linking lessons so that each builds toward an overarching conceptual understanding;

- Linking lessons to unit goals and assessments;
- Making choices about how to organize, present, and modify the curriculum.

For example, Gabrielle worked to focus her unit on revolutions on understanding the influence of Enlightenment thought so each lesson contributed to that overarching concept.

"Developing and Enacting Pedagogical Content Knowledge for Teaching History: An Exploration of Two Novice Teachers' Growth Over Three Years" by Chauncey Monte-Sano and Christopher Budano in *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, April-June 2013 (Vol. 22, #2, p. 171-211), http://bit.ly/15qFs99; Monte-Sano can be reached at cmontesa@umich.edu.

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6. Robert Marzano on Being Clear on Learning Objectives

(Originally titled "Targets, Objectives, Standards: How Do They Fit?")

In this *Educational Leadership* column, author/consultant/researcher Robert Marzano notes there is confusion about what the terms *learning targets, instructional objectives, learning goals, outcomes, educational objectives,* and *standards* mean and how they fit together. Here are his suggestions on how to get clarity:

• *Agree on a consistent set of terms*. Ideally everyone within a district uses curriculum vocabulary the same way.

• *Start with objectives for each curriculum unit*. These are clear statements of what students should know and be able to do by the end.

• *Break the objectives into a learning progression*. This helps teachers give students feedback on how they're progressing. For example, in a health unit on assertiveness, the progression might include:

- Using specific refusal skills in a real-life situation and reporting the outcome.
- Using specific refusal strategies such as not hesitating, looking the person in the eye, keeping responses short and clear, and speaking respectfully.
- Describing why refusal skills are especially important for teenagers.
- Explaining basic terminology – peer pressure, personal responsibility, group dynamics.

• *Use the learning progression to establish daily targets*. These flow naturally from a well-articulated progression – although targets can take more than one day and don't necessarily have to be taught in the same sequence as the learning progression.

• *Translate daily targets into student-friendly language*. For example, "I can say no to someone without them getting mad at me."

"Targets, Objectives, Standards: How Do They Fit?" by Robert Marzano in *Educational Leadership*, May 2013 (Vol. 70, #8, p. 82-83), www.ascd.org

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7. "I Want to Be a Waitress Just Like My Mom"

In this thoughtful article in *Educational Researcher*, Stephanie Jones (University of Georgia) and Mark Vagle (University of Minnesota) quote the following exchange between a young girl and her teacher:

Student: When I grow up I want to be a waitress just like my mom.

Teacher: Oh, you can do so much *better* than that!

Jones and Vagle flinch at the teacher's words. The idea that poor and working-class youth should always aspire to upward mobility is "founded on misunderstandings of work, lived experiences of social class, and the broader social and economic context of the United States and the world," they say. "Educators may unwittingly alienate the very students they hope to inspire…"

So what would "social class-sensitive pedagogy" suggest that the teacher's response should be? Jones and Vagle propose the following:

Student: When I grow up I want to be a waitress just like my mom.

Teacher: Tell me more about that. I'd love to hear about your mother and the work she does as a waitress.

"Living Contradictions and Working for Change: Toward a Theory of Social Class-Sensitive Pedagogy" by Stephanie Jones and Mark Vagle in *Educational Researcher*, April 2013 (Vol. 42, #3, p. 129-141), http://edr.sagepub.com/content/42/3/129.abstract; the authors can be reached at sjones1@uga.edu and vagl0006@umn.edu.

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8. Keys to Successful Home Visits

(Originally titled "Would You Step Through My Door?")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, California third-grade teacher Stephanie Smith recommends making home visits as a way of building bonds of trust with families. She offers the following tips:

- Don't go solo. It's always best to be in the company of a teaching colleague or an administrator – and a translator if necessary.
- Ask your principal for training (and perhaps compensation). One resource is the Parent Teacher Home Visit Project at www.pthvp.org.
- Bring a gift. This might be a baggie of school supplies, a book, or a seasonal gift as an ice-breaker and show of appreciation.
- Take notes right after you leave. It's easy to lose track of details after several visits.
- Don't worry about timing. Send a note to all parents suggesting times, and try to go first to the homes where you'll need the strongest relationships. But any time in the year is fine for a visit.
- Don't worry about where you talk. Some parents are self-conscious about their homes and prefer to talk on the front porch, or even in a local restaurant or park. "The point is to visit parents in a place where they're comfortable – and get yourself off campus," says Smith.

"Would You Step Through My Door?" by Stephanie Smith in *Educational Leadership*, May 2013 (Vol. 70, #8, p. 76-78), www.ascd.org; Smith can be reached at Stephanie-smith@sac-city.k12.ca.us.

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9. Helping Parents Help Their Children with Math Homework

In this article in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, Regina Mistretta (St. John's University/New York) shares strategies for getting parents involved in their children's math learning. Here are questions that teachers could suggest parents ask their children if they are struggling with math homework:

- What problem are you working on?
- What do the directions say?
- What words or directions don't you understand?
- Where do you think you should begin?
- What do you already know that can help you work through the problem?
- What have you done so far?
- Do you have similar problems to look at?
- Can you draw a picture or make a diagram?
- Can you explain what the teacher asked you to do?
- Can you tell me where you are stuck?

"'We *Do* Care,' Say Parents" by Regina Mistretta in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, May 2013 (Vo. 19, #9, p. 572-580), www.nctm.org; Mistretta is at mistretr@stjohns.edu

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10. Tech Tools to Help Students Balance Algebraic Equations

In this article in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, Terri Kurz (Arizona State University Polytechnic/Mesa) recommends a number of online resources to teach algebraic equations:

• Balancing Act: http://pbskids.org/sid/balancingact.html

• Can You Balance?
http://teams.lacoe.edu/documentation/classrooms/linda/algebra/activities/balance/balance.html

• Poddle Weigh-In: http://pbskids.org/cyberchase/games/algebra

• Monkey Math Balance: http://www.agame.com/game/Monkey-Math-Balance.html

• Balance Beam Activity: http://mste.illinois.edu/users/pavel/java/balance/index.html#sim

• Pan Balance – Shapes: http://illuminations.nctm.org/ActivityDetail.aspx?ID=33

• Pan Balance – Numbers: http://illuminations.nctm.org/ActivityDetail.aspx?ID=26

• Algebra Balance Scales Negatives:
http://nlvm.usu.edu/en/nav/frames_asid_324_g_3_t_2.html?open=instructions&from=category_g_3_t_2.html

• Libra: http://www.smart-kit.com/games/libra/

"Using Technology to Balance Algebraic Explorations" by Terri Kurz in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, May 2013 (Vo. 19, #9, p. 554-562), www.nctm.org; Kurz can be reached at terri.kurz@asu.edu.

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11. Short Item:

Common Core support material – These two websites give lots of practical help for implementing and assessing the Common Core standards:

• The Dana Center: *Studying the Standards, Year at a Glance, Sequenced Units, &PARCC Prototype Project:* http://www.ccsstoolbox.com/parcc/PARCCPrototype_main.html

• Illustrative Math: *Illustrations of the standards:* http://illustrativemathematics.org/

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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 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).

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
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
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Harvard Business Review
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Harvard Educational Review
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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