Marshall Memo 973

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 13, 2023

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"In our socially segregated and politically polarized society, social studies teachers hold the immense responsibility of being forces for unity within our democracy… In the end, if we, as educators, continue to allow media pundits and political operatives to dictate the terms of this culture war, students who are unprepared for a globalizing multiracial world will be the ones who suffer the most."

Antony Farag in "The CRT Culture War in the Suburbs" in *Kappan*, February 2023 (Vol. 104, #5, pp. 18-23); Farag can be reached at antonyfarag@gmail.com.

"We are not a historically mature society until we acknowledge that everyone's history matters. If we continue to teach history uncritically, we will remain a historically immature society that repeats our past transgressions."

LaGarrett King in "The Road to Historical Maturity" in *Education Week*, February 8, 2023 (Vol. 42, #21, p. 14)

"One challenge for promoting civic discourse is to help students recognize when their emotions are preventing them from hearing someone else's opinions and points."

Peter Smagorinsky in "Arguing and Listening for Civic Engagement" in *English Journal*, January 2023 (Vol. 112, #3, pp. 57-63); he can be reached at smago@uga.edu.

"The ability to create and give a good speech, connect with an audience, and organize fun and productive gatherings seem like a suite of skills that A.I. will not replicate."

David Brooks (see item #1)

"We are in the people business. That means relational trust is paramount."

Matt Renwick (see item #6)

"Unquestionably, science education needs more attention starting in earlier grades so that students can create early interest, develop a foundation for more in-depth science learning, and acquire skills to help them begin to think critically. Many of the major challenges facing the world today require deep, usable scientific knowledge, not just for those going into science but for all individuals across the globe."

Joseph Krajcik et al. in "Assessing the Effect of Project-Based Learning on Science Learning in Elementary Schools" in *American Educational Research Journal*, February 2023 (Vol. 60, #1, pp. 70-102); Krajcik can be reached at krajcik@msu.edu.

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1. David Brooks on the Human Skills We Need in the Age of Bots

In his *New York Times* column, David Brooks says artificial intelligence provides tools that will allow us to outsource certain kinds of mental work – tasks that are impersonal, linear, and bureaucratic. Those are distinct from things only humans can do, and we need to double down in those areas. For K-12 and college students, this means developing:

• *A personal voice* – "Take classes," Brooks advises, "in which you are reading distinctive and flamboyant voices so you can craft your own."

• *Presentation skills* – "The ability to create and give a good speech, connect with an audience, and organize fun and productive gatherings," he says, "seem like a suite of skills that A.I. will not replicate."

• *Childlike creativity* – Brooks quotes Alison Gopnik on the way kids "find the sweet spot between the obvious and the crazy" – the way they let their minds explore, explaining the world through imaginative stories and innovative theories. Maintaining and honing those abilities is a key goal for schools.

• *Quirkiness* – Artificial intelligence is good at churning out boilerplate, says Brooks. "People with contrarian mentalities and idiosyncratic worldviews will be valuable in an age when conventional thinking is turbo-powered."

• *Empathy* – A.I. vacuums up data about no one in particular, he says. "It is not great for understanding the unique individual right in front of you." Studying literature, drama, biography, and history is the best way to imagine the world through the eyes of others.

• *Situational awareness* – This involves having an intuitive "feel for the flow of events," says Brooks. "This sensitivity flows from experience, historical knowledge, humility in the face of uncertainty, and having led a reflective and interesting life."

Thinking back on his best teachers, Brooks says he doesn't remember the curriculum content as much as who they were: "I remember how these teachers modeled a passion for

knowledge, a funny and dynamic way of connecting with students. They also modeled a set of moral virtues – how to be rigorous with evidence, how to admit error, how to coach students as they make their own discoveries. I remember how I admired them and wanted to be like them. That's a kind of knowledge you'll never get from a bot."

"In the Age of A.I., Major in Being Human" by David Brooks in *The New York Times*, February 3, 2023

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2. School Librarians Suss Out ChatGPT

In this *School Library Journal* article, Kara Yorio reports on her interviews with school librarians who are greeting ChatGPT with curiosity and hope. Some ideas:

- Helping students and teachers do research on a wide variety of topics;
- Recommending books and other materials based on students' reading level, interest, and reading history;
- Finding online tutorials, databases, and e-books;
- Providing language assistance for English learners.

Those suggestions were actually generated by the bot in response to the query, "How can school librarians use ChatGPT?" – along with a cautionary note that the librarian needs to "validate and provide the resources needed."

A library administrator in Washington state immediately saw the potential for book-finding, research, lesson plans, read-alikes, and displays. She discovered that she could refine her requests – for example, "'I want something that's a little less scary,' or 'I want something that's more about this area.' It'll keep revising, and as it revises, it gets closer and closer to what you're looking for."

A librarian in New Jersey started using ChatGPT to provide plot summaries of books she hadn't had a chance to read herself and find quotes from notable African Americans for her social media posts during Black History Month. "You have to get specific on what you want," she says. "It's learning from every inquiry, so it'll get better as it goes." She advised teachers in her school on how to spot student work generated by the bot.

ChatGPT has limitations, says Yorio. Its knowledge base ends at 2021, and answers are sometimes incorrect. There have also been bandwidth issues as millions of people log into the website. One recent attempt to access the bot got this response: *As you read this message, please take a moment to pause and breathe. Notice the sensations in your body and the rhythm of your breath. Remind yourself that you are not alone in wanting to try out ChatGPT. Many others are interested in it as well. Be patient and know that the website is doing its best to accommodate everyone. Trust that the right time for you to try ChatGPT will come. In the meantime, continue to focus on your breath and stay present in the moment.*

"The ChatGPT Revolution" by Kara Yorio in *School Library Journal*, February 2023 (Vol. 69, #2, pp. 10-12)

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3. A Problem-Solving Classroom Approach to Contentious Issues

In this *Kappan* article, Keith Barton (Indiana University/Bloomington) and Li-Ching Ho (University of Wisconsin/Madison) say that schools play a vital part in teaching students how to engage in civil discourse and decision-making after they graduate. The usual approach in classrooms is to have students consider opposing views on a controversial issue and take part in a structured debate in which each side presents arguments and evidence.

This adversarial model can be productive, say Barton and Li-Ching, but they believe it fails to prepare students for public life in two important ways:

- It excludes personal narratives, passionate expression, and arguments grounded in identity, as well as creative expression – for example, through art and music.
- It often limits debates to two opposing viewpoints, encouraging students to take and defend a position and score debating points rather than exploring other possible solutions.

The authors suggest an alternative that is common outside schools: *collaborative deliberation*. They define it as "non-adversarial problem solving within a trusting, mutually reciprocal partnership, premised on common interests and involving diverse forms of expression and communication." They suggest the following steps for orchestrating this kind of deliberation:

• *Frame questions in an open, non-adversarial way*. The way an issue is presented can invite consideration of a common concern versus supporting or opposing a position. For example, rather than asking whether universal child care should be provided (yes or no), students might be asked how working families can have greater access to child care. Rather than asking whether hate speech should be permitted, students are asked how vulnerable groups can be protected against verbal attacks.

• *Encourage students to identify shared interests and concerns*. "In classrooms, as in the wider society, shared interests and trusting relationships are not automatic," say Barton and Li-Ching; "children and adults often must forge these out of diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Helping students discover common goals and build trust, then, becomes an important means of preparing them for collaborative deliberation." On the issue of child care, for example, student groups might explore market-based strategies, state subsidies, expansion of state-run facilities, expanded parental leave, and more-flexible workplace conditions.

• *Encourage and teach diverse forms of expression*. Deliberations in the outside world can be "messy, fluid, unstructured, and accepting of different communication styles," say the authors. "Teachers need to establish norms that accept different forms of expression, make space for expressions of emotion and passion, and allow for a range of discourse, including arguments supported by personal testimony… Teachers must help students gain insight into when to use various forms of communication, how to do so effectively, and what purposes different forms of expression can serve."

Collaborative deliberation can be just as difficult as the adversarial approach, say Barton and Li-Ching. There will still be disagreements among people strongly committed to their own way of seeing things. Collaborative deliberation may even be more challenging,

since rather than winning the debate, there's a premium on crafting a solution and maintaining relationships.

"Nonetheless," say the authors, "the nature of such disagreements will differ because they are set up not as conflicts between opposed goals but as attempts to work together on a shared problem." In addition, the solutions students come up with "should be more-nuanced and complex, as well as better grounded in evidence (both personal experience and other reasons), than the kinds of argumentation that arise from a choice between preexisting positions." All this is much better preparation for the kinds of problem solving K-12 graduates will encounter in their families, communities, and workplaces.

"Collaborative Deliberation in the Classroom" by Keith Barton and Li-Ching Ho in *Kappan*, February 2023 (Vol. 104, #5, pp. 44-49); the authors can be reached at kcbarton@indiana.edu and liching.ho@wisc.edu.

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4. A Teacher-Led, Soup-to-Nuts ELA Curriculum Revision

(Originally titled "Revamping the Curriculum as Teachers, for Teachers")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, Pennsylvania high-school teacher Marilyn Pryle describes how her English department decided to revamp their curriculum. While their school was getting good test scores, there were problems, including: "None of us knew what the other grades were doing," 25-year-old anthologies, and a parent social media page critiquing book choices and singling out teachers by name. In short, says Pryle, "We needed order, transparency, and support."

Budget cuts had eliminated the central office ELA director, but Pryle convinced the superintendent to make her a teacher-on-assignment for 2021-22 and have her lead this process:

• *Teacher survey* – A poll of the 12-person department confirmed the grade-to-grade coordination problem, along with a lack of diversity among book authors and insufficient focus on global skills, authentic speaking and writing, media literacy, self-awareness, and cultural competence.

• *Mission* – Pryle had teachers write the top three goals of the department on index cards and used those to draft a statement of purpose and a chart of the steps they would follow.

• *Curriculum mapping* – Pryle substitute-taught for each teacher for half a day, freeing them up to write month-by-month descriptions of the texts they were teaching, activities, essential questions, and assessments. By December, she had curriculum charts for all classes.

• *Standards* – Pryle then spent two months looking at whether each teacher's curriculum choices covered Pennsylvania's ELA standards. "As the sole analyst," she says, "I could immerse myself in the meaning of each standard and look for trends both in our strengths and our weaknesses as a department." By spring, teachers met and looked at Pryle's individual notes on standards covered and missed. The biggest gaps were public speaking, which pointed to the need to develop Socratic seminars and fishbowl discussions; and using technology,

which got teachers thinking about publishing students' work using apps like Blooket, Google Sites, and Goodreads.

• *Representation* – Pryle presented spreadsheets of authors color-coded by race and gender, showing graphically a canon that was overwhelmingly white, male, and straight. "Our teachers found this analysis eye-opening," she says, and there were lively discussions about keeping and letting go of "the classics." Pryle didn't issue a mandate, but there were some immediate changes: *Passing* was added as a counterpoint to *The Great Gatsby*, *Things Fall Apart* complemented *Heart of Darkness*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* was replaced by *The Nickel Boys*.

• *Revisions* – For the remainder of the school year, teachers worked on adding activities and assessments to address standards gaps, especially oral presentation, technology, and diversity. "Some changes were big and most were smaller," says Pryle, "but all of them were in the right direction."

• *Approval* – The superintendent convened a committee composed of Pryle, the assistant superintendent, an elementary principal, three school board members, and himself. The overall reaction to the proposed changes was positive, but some board members pushed back on the age-appropriateness of some texts, including a few that had been taught for years. "I found this a bit frustrating," says Pryle. "We know what we're doing! How dare we be questioned!" But she bit her tongue, seeing that teachers couldn't defend working in silos. She answered every question and the committee approved all the curriculum changes, followed by the full school board a week later, giving "an incredible morale boost" to Pryle and her colleagues.

• *Onward* – Pryle is now back in her classroom, teaching world literature to sophomores six periods a day. "I am not the same teacher as when I left," she says. "I now fully know what my colleagues teach, what they emphasize, and how my class fits with theirs. I know how our classes and departmental mission shape our students. And what I don't know, I can look up." The ELA curriculum continues to evolve, with fresh thinking and texts every year.

A postscript: district leaders were so impressed with the work of the ELA department that they decided to replicate it for math, releasing a lead teacher for a year to conduct a similar effort.

"Revamping the Curriculum as Teachers, for Teachers" by Marilyn Pryle in *Educational Leadership*, February 2023 (Vol. 80, #5, online); Pryle can be reached at marilynpryle@gmail.com.

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5. Was Gatsby Black?

In this article in *The Atlantic*, Alonzo Vereen says that in his first year teaching in an impoverished rural community in South Florida, he was confident *The Great Gatsby* would fascinate his tenth graders: "Dr. Eckleburg's eyes on the billboard, the green light at the end of the dock, the cars, the music." But the book bombed. Vocabulary was an issue, but more

important was the vast cultural divide between Gatsby's world and that of his students, mostly first-generation Americans whose parents had come from Haiti, Cuba, Mexico, and Guatemala. Vereen couldn't get students interested in the book.

His disappointment (and panic – the book was part of the required curriculum) took Vereen back to when he first read the book as a junior at an HBCU. He himself found the novel baffling until he happened to read a book by Carlyle Van Thompson arguing that Gatsby was actually an African American passing as white. "Stumbling on Thompson's analysis of *The Great Gatsby*," says Vereen, "was like finding a door propped open, and I rushed through with questions. What if the novel's focus on class and ethnic tensions obscures a racial drama that readers have read right over?"

And indeed, there are plenty of bread crumbs in the book to support the theory. All the major characters except Gatsby are clearly described as white: Nick Carraway is Scottish, his maid is Finnish, Meyer Wolfsheim is Jewish, Tom Buchanan and Jordan Baker are Nordic, Daisy Buchanan had a "white girlhood." With Gatsby, there are none of those descriptors, and a variety of hints, among them: his "graceful, conservative foxtrot," his "brown, hardening body," hair that "looked as though it were trimmed every day," and a mansion sitting on 40 acres of land.

And what are we to make of what Tom says to Gatsby on learning of Daisy's infidelity: "I'll be damned if I see how you got within a mile of [Daisy] unless you brought the groceries to the back door." At the very least, says Vereen, "The ambiguity of Gatsby's race and ethnicity shatters the black-and-white framework we reflexively impose on so many classic texts." In the literary canon, we assume that if the race of characters is not specified, they are white – but what if F. Scott Fitzgerald had something else in mind?

Remembering all this, Vereen revised his Gatsby lesson plans for his South Florida students, and "the text was freshly lit." He played the trailer for the Baz Luhrmann adaptation of the novel, with a score produced by Jay-Z, and when Gatsby appeared (played by Leonardo DiCaprio), Vereen asked, "Why is Gatsby white?" "Because that's what the book says," students answered. "Does it?" he asked, pretending to be confused.

"Suddenly they were invested," he says. "They began scouring the novel for evidence of Gatsby's race. They were forced to look up words they didn't know, in the hope that those words would yield more clues. The students parsed intricate sentences down to their essence to extrapolate a clear meaning. And soon they began probing for deeper interpretations." They wondered about the two Eggs (black and white?), Daisy's upbringing in Louisville (a hidden background?), and what Gatsby was really after (whiteness?). The students in this class, and in Vereen's subsequent years of teaching, delved more deeply into this book than any other they studied. "In sifting through pages and pages of textual evidence," he says, "they found room for themselves in one of America's greatest novels – indeed, in American culture."

"A New Way to Read *Gatsby*" by Alonzo Vereen in *The Atlantic*, March 2023 (Vol. 331, #2, pp. 66-68)

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6. Working with Educators Who Are Resistant to Change

In this *Read by Example* article, Wisconsin principal/author Matt Renwick lists seven questions that school leaders and instructional coaches might ask themselves as they work with colleagues who seem resistant to improving their practice:

• *Do I know them as a person?* "We are in the people business," says Renwick. "That means relational trust is paramount." He likes Heather Fisher's idea of taking a staff list and writing by each name one thing you know about the person's life outside school – for example, a non-educational hobby, what their grown children are doing. "These nuggets of knowledge serve as talking points during informal conversations," says Renwick. "They feel noticed and you come across as more humane and caring."

• *Do I show curiosity?* Too often, says Renwick, we make assumptions based on previous conversations and events. "Believing I always have more to learn," he says, "demonstrated through genuine questions and requests for clarification, avoids creating more problems."

• *Have I recognized this person's strengths and successes?* "If the first communication I have with an educator is about how they could improve," says Renwick, "what I am also potentially communicating is, 'You are someone who needs improvement,' or 'You need my support to be successful' It should not be surprising when resistance arises." It's wise to recognize strong points, especially if they align to a new initiative.

• *Is my feedback a reasonable next step?* A suggestion that is beyond a colleague's current capabilities is not helpful. Better to look for smaller actions that are do-able and can be built on over time.

• *Is the school's vision and instructional rationale clear?* Beyond higher test scores, do colleagues understand aspirational goals such as students becoming independent readers, writers, and communicators?

• *Does what I do align with what I say?* For example, a principal talks a lot about the value of students being readers and writers; does the school's budget support classroom libraries, and is student writing a priority in the schedule?

• *Do staff members have input on important schoolwide decisions?* An instructional leadership team is a helpful forum in which colleagues can make their voices heard, drawing on current data, research, and the school's priorities. One hundred percent buy-in won't happen, says Renwick, but dissenters can be encouraged to join the team and share their views.

"7 Questions I Ask Myself When Working with Educators Resistant to Change" by Matt Renwick in *Read By Example*, February 11, 2023; Renwick can be reached at renwickme@gmail.com.

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7. Wait Time: A Refresher

In this *Mathematics Teacher* article, Kathryn Early, Brea Ratliff, and Gary Martin (Auburn University) and Elizabeth Hammonds and Mariya Rosenhammer (Columbus State University) describe what one of the authors noticed observing a preservice teacher: "He had a

tendency to ask a question and then immediately ask another question or launch into an explanation, which limited opportunities for students to respond." After class, the observer showed him an abbreviated transcript indicating when he spoke (T) and when a student (S) spoke; it looked like this: T T T S T T S T T S.

Coached on asking better questions and giving three seconds of wait time after each question, the teacher improved, producing this pattern: T S T S T S T T S. But classroom interactions were still quite teacher-centered. The solution was to leave wait time not only after the teacher's question but after each *student* response. When the teacher tried this, participation and interaction showed marked improvement: T S S T S T S T T T S T S S S T S T.

Research on wait time (sometimes called think time or purposeful pauses) goes back 50 years, with the following documented benefits:

- An increase in the length and number of student responses.
- Students using more-advanced reasoning and sense-making.
- Teachers getting a better understanding of student thinking.
- Students asking more questions.
- Teachers asking more open-ended questions.
- An increase in students' emotional and attitudinal engagement.
- Teachers using student responses to make on-the-spot changes to meet students' needs.

The research notwithstanding, many teachers need to be reminded of how silently saying *One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi* after each teacher question and student response can bring about marked improvements in classroom dynamics. The authors offer the following suggestions and insights:

• *Wait for three seconds!* "Like initiating a new exercise program," they say, "it is hard to get started. Building the habit of counting to three *before* you begin talking is a way to ensure that you do wait."

• *Be persistent as students get used to the change*. When wait time is first implemented, some students are confused because they're not getting an immediate teacher evaluation (*Was I wrong?*). In addition, the silences can feel awkward.

• *Recognize that wait time will slow down the pace of instruction*. But less is more, say Early and colleagues, because the quality and depth of teacher-student and student-student interactions improve. It is important to choose your questions wisely so that essential content is addressed in each lesson.

• *Cold call and poll*. Some students will thrive when there's more space to discuss ideas, say the authors, but others will remain quiet unless the teacher has a system for making sure everyone participates.

• *Continuously improve question quality*. "More open-ended questions will naturally support the necessary wait time that will drive the conversation," say Early et al. "After each class, note the kinds of questions that best promoted productive discourse."

"Rethinking Wait Time: What Can 3 Seconds Do?" by Kathryn Early, Elizabeth Hammonds, Brea Ratliff, Mariya Rosenhammer, and Gary Martin in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning &*

Teaching PK-12, January 2023 (Vol. 116, #2, pp. 108-114); Early can be reached at kze0019@auburn.edu.

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8. Illustrated Children's Books on African-American Songs

In this *School Library Journal* feature, Cicely Lewis recommends five books that enhance classic African-American songs:

- *Standing in Need of Prayer: A Modern Retelling of the Classic Spiritual* by Carole Boston Weatherford, illustrated by Frank Morrison, grade 1-4
- *Lift Every Voice and Change: A Sound Book: A Celebration of Black Leaders and the Words That Inspire Generations* by Charnaie Gordon, illustrated by Aeron Cargill, grade 3-7
- *We Shall Overcome* by Bryan Collier, grade 1-2
- *I Got the Rhythm* by Connie Schofield-Morrison, illustrated by Frank Morrison, preschool-grade 1
- *Every Little Thing: Based on the Song "Three Little Birds"* by Bob Marley, adapted by Cedella Marley, illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton, baby-toddler

"Picture the Music" by Cicely Lewis in *School Library Journal*, February 2023 (Vol. 69, #2, p. 18)

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9. Can You Add to These Mixed Metaphors?

In this column in *The Boston Globe*, Barbara Wallraff shares ridiculous job titles (including Chief Nostalgia Officer, Head of Daytime Factuality, and Vice President in Charge of Things Beginning with the Letter H) and challenges readers to contribute suggestions for mixed metaphors and "ludicrous tangles of figurative language." To prime the pump, she provides these:

- Let's put the elephant on the table.
- It's not rocket surgery.
- Don't bite a gift horse in the mouth.
- He's not the sharpest cookie in the jar.

Send suggestions to Wallraff at Barbara.Wallraff@globe.com by this Friday, February 17th, including where you live.

"Parody-Worthy Job Titles" by Barbara Wallraff in *The Boston Globe*, February 12, 2023 (p. K2).

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
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 other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 48 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTMI version as well.

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief
Cult of Pedagogy
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education