Marshall Memo 994

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
July 10, 2023

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"If you want to be fulfilled and successful at work, it's important to acknowledge when you're working beyond your individual capacity and be open to seeking assistance."
Manfred Kets de Vries (see item #1)

"Students are not often afforded the opportunity to enjoy a piece of literature, to spend time with it as human beings, before they are asked to do something 'school' with it."
Megan Davis (see item #3)

"We need to create conditions that allow students to make and document their mistakes and that provide the time for them to reflect on and value learning from such mistakes."
Joseph Manfre (see item #2)

"Remember, the point of all this is to make the reading sound meaningful. If students can convert the words on the page into sentences that sound meaningful, they will then be on their way to fuller comprehension and better reading."
Timothy Shanahan (see item #4)

"It is not the learning style of the child that prevents the child from learning. It is the perceptions of the teacher of the child's style as a sign of incapacity that causes the teacher to reduce the quality of instruction offered."
Asa Hilliard III (quoted in item #5)

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1. Overcoming Our Reluctance to Asking for Help

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Manfred Kets de Vries (INSEAD) says that self-reliance is a much-admired quality in our society. "But if you want to be fulfilled and successful at work," he says, "it's important to acknowledge when you're working beyond your individual capacity and be open to seeking assistance."

The problem is a variety of psychological factors that lead people to go it alone when they shouldn't:

- Fear of appearing incompetent and weak – The person might also be suffering from imposter syndrome.
- Needing to be self-sufficient – Some people are programmed by family and cultural mores to play Lone Ranger.
- Fear of losing control – Resistance to reaching out might be a reluctance to being beholden to others.
- Fear of rejection – What if the person we ask for help says no? It's hard not to take that personally.
- Overempathizing with others – We're so tuned in to other people's heavy workload or stress level that we don't want to impose on them.
- A sense of victimhood – Some people go through life with a sense that they don't deserve to be helped, so they never ask.

"Clearly, many of the people caught up in these behaviors have self-esteem issues," says de Vries. "But history isn't destiny. Once you've figured out why you avoid asking for help, it's possible to change your behavior." His pointers on rewriting the inner script:

• *Seek counsel*. Sitting with a coach or therapist might make a big difference, especially for people who have grown up in a caretaker role, always tending to others and not themselves.

• *Reframe*. Rather than seeing a request for help as a burden on colleagues and family members, see it as an opportunity for them to step up and contribute. "When you place trust in others," says de Vries, "you show that you value them, which deepens the relationship. In turn they'll trust you enough to ask for help when they're in need themselves." A rejected request for help can also be reframed as feedback on how and when to ask for help next time.

• *Be SMART*. Make requests that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Explain why you need help, suggest steps the other person could take, be aware of the other person's capabilities, and be explicit about when it needs to happen. It's also wise to be smart about timing and tone, not asking people for help when they're stressed out or in a bad mood.

• *Communicate*. One of de Vries's clients was so stoic that her colleagues, friends, and family members had no idea what she was going through juggling stressful work and childcare responsibilities. By being more open about her feelings, and by having lunch in the company's cafeteria rather than bringing her own and eating alone in her office, she opened channels and even got some offers of help without asking.

• *Just do it*. "As with any skill," says de Vries, "asking for help gets much easier with practice." His stoic client was surprised when she got offers to split carpooling children to school, and that success motivated her to reach out to a former university classmate for a monthly chat about knotty issues in their respective workplaces.

"Why It's So Hard to Ask for Help" by Manfred Kets de Vries in *Harvard Business Review*, July/August 2023 (Vol. 101, #4, pp. 139-143)

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2. How Is Correcting Math Mistakes Like a Making a Good Apology?

In this *Edutopia* article, Hawaii educator Joseph Manfre says the steps involved in giving a good apology transfer neatly to other contexts – including correcting mathematical errors in school. With an apology (for example, a student in Manfre's class whose heavy backpack accidently bumped a classmate's head as he leaned forward), the key elements are (a) acknowledging the mistake, (b) taking responsibility, and (c) thinking about how to avoid it in the future.

With math errors, Manfre suggests the following steps (using the example of a student who gave 6 as the incorrect answer to 3 squared):

- *What did you do, or what was the thought process that led to the mistake?* A student might say, "I multiplied my base 3 with my exponent 2 and got 6."
- *What should you have done?* "I should have known that the exponent represents two factors of my base being multiplied."
- *Re-do the part of the problem where the mistake occurred (not the entire problem).* "So I should multiply 3 x 3, which is 9."
- *Create and solve your own example of that part.* "Four squared is 16."

"In this response," says Manfre, "the student takes ownership for what they did and what they should have done, leaving the error less likely to occur in the future… We need to create conditions that allow students to make and document their mistakes and that provide the time for them to reflect on and value learning from such mistakes. When we do this, we cultivate the growth mindset in our students through concrete examples of their iterative growth."

"A Lesson in Correcting Mistakes" by Joseph Manfre in *Edutopia*, June 28, 2023

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3. What Happens When a Teacher Starts Every Class With a Poem?

In this *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* article, Megan Davis (Teachers College, Columbia University) says when she was in high school, at the beginning of every

class her English teacher would turn on the overhead projector, slide a transparency across the glass, wait for students to quiet down, and then read a poem: "John Updike on baseball, Barbara Hamby on her beloved 1977 Toyota, Linda Pastan on time, or the calendar's recent slip into autumn. Haikus from Basho, Issa, and Buson on Fridays. Every day different, every day a poem."

This teacher's daily routine transformed Davis's negative feelings about English and helped her see poetry "as a capacious form that could calm and resonate as often as it could perplex and frustrate." She was so taken with the idea that when she became a high-school English teacher, she projected and read a poem at the beginning of every class, 180 poems a year. In this article, Davis reports on a series of interviews she conducted with former students about this facet of her teaching. "Was it powerful?" she wondered. "Did they just zone out?"

The students Davis interviewed talked about a variety of experiences they had with poetry before enrolling in her class:

- Rhyming words and the same thing over and over;
- Definitely negative;
- Old and boring;
- Antiquated language;
- Something that seemed really restrictive and not creative at all;
- Dumb and unnecessary;
- Nervous-making when asked to recite poems in class.

Students reported liking the poem of the day, says Davis: a fun ritual "untethered to an assignment," something they looked forward to each day, that "lightened the mood," connected them with classmates, provided a communal experience, started conversations, and was a pleasant transition to a new class before the work began. Most important, the ritual gave them a new and consistently positive experience with poetry – "invitations to imagine, breathe, and allow for a moment to reflect and refocus."

Students reported that the daily poem helped them rethink their negative experiences with poetry; it "was not as weird, inflexible, dull, emotional, scary, gimmicky, or nonacademic as they had once thought." One student said that as a result of the poem of the day, "Everything I see now is a poem" – walking in the hallways, observing the trees, "the stillness of everything."

The key to these positive reactions, Davis believes, was the varied selection of poems she chose. "Though it is hard to guess which poems will resonate with students," she says, "choosing a wide range of poetry – in terms of form, poet, era, topic, theme, and style while incorporating contemporary and recently published poetry – is a way to provide a host of landing points. If I hoped to loosen students' preconceived definitions of poetry, it would follow that I exposed them to poetry's multitudes."

"Though reading students a poem each day to start class will not solve all resistance to poetry," Davis concludes, "I am convinced that it opens up an invitation for authentic, wide-ranging, and consistent experiences with poetry for student and teacher. Students are not often

afforded the opportunity to enjoy a piece of literature, to spend time with it as human beings, before they are asked to do something 'school' with it."

"'Every Day Do Something That Won't Compute': Student Perceptions of Daily Poetry Practice" by Megan Davis in *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, May/June 2023 (Vol. 66, #6, p. 367-376); Davis can be reached at med2240@tc.columbia.edu. See Memo 890 for another article on this idea.

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4. Timothy Shanahan on Prosody

In this article on his website, literacy expert Timothy Shanahan (University of Illinois/Chicago) answers a teacher's question on the importance of prosody – reading with expression – and how it can be measured. The teacher noted that her district-required monitoring assessments measured only accuracy and reading rate.

"As readers progress," says Shanahan, "they can read more words accurately, they are able to do this with less conscious effort (automaticity), and their prosody gets better, too." But the connection between prosody and other reading skills is not well understood. Is it a positive side effect as reading proficiency improves, something that comes naturally as students learn to decode, build their sight vocabularies, and read more quickly? Or is prosody something teachers need to explicitly focus on to develop students' overall reading proficiency?

What exactly is prosody? Shanahan cites the 2000 National Reading Panel and other studies' descriptions:

- Reading with proper expressiveness;
- Making the text sound like spoken language;
- Appropriate smoothness, intonation, and phrasing that conveys meaning;
- Variations in pitch, duration of vowels, stress on syllables, and pausing;
- Breaking up or parsing text into meaningful units to manage the information.

Prosody comes into play with oral reading of connected texts (versus reading individual words), which is why it's so important to comprehension, says Shanahan. Saying words accurately and rapidly is not enough; adding prosody is an important link to making sense of what's being read.

But prosody is challenging to measure. It's "a complex variable with multiple parts," says Shanahan. "Scientists are still trying to figure out the best way to measure each of those parts." What's more, prosody varies with the text's complexity, the vocabulary load, and the reader's background knowledge.

Shanahan suggests that teachers use NAEP's four-point scale, which focuses mainly on students' pauses as they read – a variable that's easy to observe and has a clear relationship to comprehension. Here's how a child's oral reading is rated:

- The text is read choppily, mainly word by word – 1
- Pausing every second or third word without attention to grammar or punctuation – 2
- Pausing between multi-word segments with attention to punctuation and grammar – 3
- Pausing is consistent with grammar, punctuation, *and* meaning – 4

Children reading at levels 1 and 2 show disfluency, which interferes with comprehension. Listening to a child reading at level 3 and 4, you can grasp the meaning without having the text in front of you. At level 4, it's clear that students understand what they are reading.

"Obviously there's more to prosody than pausing," says Shanahan. "But pausing seems to be a powerful proxy for the whole thing. Kids who aren't pausing at appropriate places probably aren't doing much else to make the text meaningful."

Having diagnosed a student's prosody level using these simple criteria, teachers can intervene appropriately. One time-tested strategy with students reading at levels 1 and 2 is *repeated reading*. "Having students read text aloud that they cannot already read well – and doing so two or three times to try to read it better – can have positive effects on accuracy, automaticity, and prosody," says Shanahan. "Such rereading practice may include encouraging kids to make questions sound like questions or using their voice to allow a listener to distinguish narrative from dialogue."

Another approach is teaching students how to chunk words and phrases within sentences – where the pauses should go. One study found that students who took a standardized test with appropriate pauses marked in the text scored a full grade level better than students whose tests didn't have chunks highlighted. As students learn how to pause at the appropriate points, the teacher gives less and less guidance until students can do it independently.

"Remember," Shanahan concludes, "the point of all this is to make the reading sound meaningful. If students can convert the words on the page into sentences that sound meaningful, they will then be on their way to fuller comprehension and better reading."

"Can We Really Teach Prosody and Why Would We Want To?" by Timothy Shanahan in Shanahan on Literacy, July 8, 2023; Shanahan can be reached at shanahan@uic.edu.

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5. The Evolution of Culturally Responsive Teaching

In this *Teachers College Record* article, Thomas Fallace (William Paterson University) traces the history of the controversial idea that there is an African-American learning style. Fallace says the idea became prominent with the publication of a 1982 book by Janice Hale, *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles*. Hale built on the work of Asa Hilliard III and other scholars to assert that black children have "distinctive learning and expressive styles." Hale argued that African-American students have a preference for relationship-oriented and inferential reasoning, versus the dominant school emphasis on abstractions and deductive reasoning. In addition, said Hale, Hilliard, and others, standardized tests did not accurately measure black students' intellectual and interpersonal strengths.

By the late 1980s, the idea that black and white students learned differently had become accepted by many researchers. But there was pushback, especially after the New York State Board of Regents issued a 1987 pamphlet saying that "children's racial, ethnic, and emotional backgrounds and cultures influence the manner in which they learn concepts and process

information." The pamphlet argued that the high dropout rate of African-American students could be attributed in part to the failure of teachers and schools to take into account students' learning styles.

Criticism was immediate and came from all sides. An African-American assemblywoman from Queens said, "God didn't give brains on the basis of color. What are you going to tell teachers that have Asian, black, white, and Hispanic kids – that they are going to have four different lesson plans?" The head of the New York State School Boards Association said the idea "leads to stereotyping of the worst degree." And the renowned psychologist Kenneth Clark said, "If [black] kids are respected and taught, they will learn."

In a 1992 article, Hilliard defended the idea of a distinct African-American cultural and behavioral style, but said he was unsure of the pedagogical implications. Pointing to disparities in test scores, he said, "It is not the learning style of the child that prevents the child from learning. It is the perceptions of the teacher of the child's style as a sign of incapacity that causes the teacher to reduce the quality of instruction offered." Citing the commendable willingness of U.S. businesses to recognize different cultural styles, Hilliard suggested that educators follow suit.

James Banks and James Anderson joined the debate in an influential 1988 article, arguing that race was more important than class in school dynamics, describing significant differences in cultural mores with deep historical roots. But they warned teachers not to assume that individual students had a particular learning style, since the research was based on average differences across groups. "These kinds of assumptions result in new stereotypes and problems," he wrote.

In a 1995 book chapter, Jaqueline Jordan Irvine and Darlene Eleanor York expressed skepticism about race-based learning styles, but pointed to some positive outcomes of the debate in schools: the importance of a teacher's mindset when working with culturally diverse students, and the way a heightened consciousness "rightly places responsibility for student learning with teachers, instead of ascribing blame to students and their parents."

By the 1990s, the idea of racially distinct learning styles was losing momentum, driven in part by the concern that it was leading to a watered-down curriculum for children of color. In addition, there was widespread criticism (led by Daniel Willingham at the University of Virginia) of the idea that teachers needed to tailor instruction to students according to visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learning styles.

The emphasis shifted to culturally responsive and relevant teaching and tuning in on individual students' "learning repertoires," as discussed in the work of Geneva Gay, Sonia Nieto, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Kris Gutierrez, Barbara Rogoff, and others. Gay recognized the importance of culture and cultural mismatch in the classroom, but steered teachers away from using learning styles to pigeonhole students or sort them into ethnically homogeneous classroom groups.

"The problem that African-American students face," wrote Ladson-Billings in a 1995 article, "is the constant devaluation of their culture both in school and in the larger society. Thus the styles apparent in African-American youth culture – e.g., dress, music, walk,

language – are equated with poor academic performance." Ladson-Billings closely studied eight teachers who boosted the academic performance of their African-American students. The teachers succeeded by making academic success "cool" and linked leadership and school success to students' cultural attributes in ways that inspired them to achieve. The teachers also encouraged students to look critically at economic and social inequality in their communities.

"Ultimately," Fallace concludes, "the black learning style idea emerged from well-intended efforts aimed at creating a liberating, engaging, and relevant experience for marginalized students. However, when misunderstood and misapplied by teachers and some scholars, the race-based learning style approach came dangerously close to racial stereotyping and social sorting. With the advent of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy, the onus of learning has shifted from the student onto the teacher. In other words, rather than identifying the learning styles and characteristics of individual students, teachers were invited to reflect on their own cultural and racial biases, assumptions, and misunderstandings, and to search for materials and methods that better aligned with the diverse experiences of their students."

"Herman Witkin and the Rise and Fall of the Black Learning Style Idea, 1960-2003" by Thomas Fallace in *Teachers College Record*, April 2023 (Vol. 124, #4, pp. 67-94); Fallace can be reached at FALLACET@wpunj.edu.

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6. Going Deeper with ChatGPT

(Originally titled "Taking a Transformative Approach to AI")

In this article in *Educational Leadership*, author/consultant Tony Frontier says educators can have three possible responses to a technological breakthrough like ChatGPT:

• *Status quo management* – School districts try to block it or buy software to detect student cheating, which will be futile with kids who are adept at working around such limits.

• *Transactional responses* – Teachers use large language models as a "souped-up search engine" or an enhanced Pinterest, generating ideas for lesson plans or tips for activities and projects. These can be helpful, says Frontier, but the worst possible scenario is teachers using artificial intelligence to design assignments, students using it to complete the assignments, and teachers using it to grade them – in other words, AI churns out more work, but there's little intellectual engagement and the work is "soullessly devoid of relevance or meaning."

• *Transformational responses* – This involves asking big, open-ended questions, says Frontier – for example: *If you could use AI to provide individualized, one-on-one teaching and tutoring to students each day, what opportunities would you provide to each learner?* Some possibilities:

- Make curriculum content accessible to each student – for example, have AI rewrite a passage at the 10th-grade level to the 3rd-grade level – or in another language.
- Have AI ascertain a student's understandings and misunderstandings on a topic through a personalized formative assessment, then AI coaches the student, creates a new quiz, and gives immediate feedback on the student's level of understanding.

- Have AI create specific examples and non-examples that show students what to aspire to and avoid on a writing assignment, and then have students use the exemplars to assess their own work.

"These responses are transformational because they discard old assumptions about the interrelationships among technology, information, teachers, students, and learning," says Frontier. "A question that invites teachers to think differently about how AI might be used as a tool to transform their capacity to provide targeted, relevant instruction to each student can help them see beyond the transactional, urgent busyness that can fill a school day."

Frontier suggests some additional transformational questions:

- *What do we accept as evidence of a student's understanding when done independently? When augmented by technology?*
- *What opportunity gaps will widen due to inequitable access to AI? How can we respond?*
- *How might the traditional role of a teacher – designing lessons, presenting content, modeling skills, assigning tasks, assessing student work, and giving grades – be augmented, or undermined, by AI?*
- *How might deeper, more-nuanced roles of highly effective teachers – establishing a culture of learning and inquiry, engaging the whole child, teaching students to be reflective learners – be augmented, or undermined, by AI?*

"Taking a Transformative Approach to AI" by Tony Frontier in *Educational Leadership*, Summer 2023 (Vol. 80, #9, pp. 12-17); Frontier can be reached at tonyfrontier@gmail.com.

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7. Skillfully Framing Questions When Using Large Language Models

(Originally titled "Prompt Literacy: A Key for AI-Based Learning")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, consultant/instructional coach Michael Fisher and curriculum mapping guru Heidi Hayes Jacobs say that to get the most from ChatGPT and other large language models, educators and students need to become adept at posing the right questions. They suggest the four-step CAST model:

• *Criteria* – The format and scope of what's being requested – for example, are you looking for short sentences, a bulleted list, rhyming couplets, a specific type of vocabulary?

• *Audience* – Who the output is geared toward – for example, fourth-grade students, a group of meteorologists, a DEI committee.

• *Specifications* – Relevant details and descriptions – for example, "Write a poem about summer in iambic pentameter using a languid tone."

• *Testing* – Check and refine the original prompt to add additional criteria and fine-tune the product; perhaps asking AI to help brainstorm or present a logical sequence of steps.

"As part of prompt literacy development," say Fisher and Jacobs, "educators should also encourage students to defend or extend their output. Why is this the best answer? What products could I create with this information? Did the AI get it right and how do I know?" All

this is vital to working proficiently with and thinking critically about these new tools, they say – "skills that will become increasingly important in the age of AI."

"Prompt Literacy: A Key for AI-Based Learning" by Michael Fisher and Heidi Hayes Jacobs in *Educational Leadership*, Summer 2023 (Vol. 80, #9, pp. 18-19); Jacobs can be reached at heidi@curriculum21.com.

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8. Picture Books: An Unconventional Resource for High-School History

In this article in *Social Education*, Brianne Pitts (Western Michigan University), Jennifer Pontius-Vandenberg (Mariner High School, WA), and Darren Guido (Caesar Rodney Schools, DE) say picture books about dramatic events in U.S. history should not be confined to the elementary grades. Here are some ways these books can be used with high-school students:

- To enjoy the books' rich content and dramatic illustrations;
- To engage in critical textual analysis of nuance and interpretation;
- For English learners, to have ready access to the content;
- To consider which historical stories should and shouldn't be presented to younger kids;
- To analyze the hard truths authors and illustrators include and what they leave out;
- To critique the assumptions made about age, gender, class, culture, and race;
- To think about the positionalities of the authors, illustrators, reviewers, and publishers;
- To judge whether the books' historical simplifications are justified;
- To ponder why some dramatic stories aren't in high-school textbooks;
- To apply what they learn when reading more-challenging primary source documents.

"These strategies," say Pitt, Pontius-Vandenberg, and Guido, "allow them to question the status quo, enhance critical thinking, and provide multiple positions from which to examine a story."

The authors suggest a five-step protocol for getting the most mileage from well-chosen picture books:

- Meet the book's creators: Who are the authors and illustrators, why was the story important to them, and what did reviewers say about it?
- Check comprehension: Who are the main characters, what's the setting, why did the protagonists act the way they did, and how does the book describe key events?
- Critique illustrations: Who is depicted and who is missing? Why did the illustrator make certain choices?
- Compare primary and secondary sources: What facts did you learn from this book and not in your textbook – and vice versa? Any conflicts between sources? Which are most reliable?
- Take action: Write to the author. Write to the textbook company. Rewrite a portion of the text. Revise a Wikipedia entry with new information. Draw an illustration from a different perspective. Summarize the text in creative ways. Hold a Socratic seminar or a structured debate. Research a historical figure.

Pitts, Pontius-Vandenberg, and Guido suggest four books for this process and include a suggested lesson plan for each:

- *Freedom Soup* by Tami Charles, illustrated by Jacqueline Alcántara
- *The Undefeated* by Kwame Alexander, illustrated by Kadir Nelson
- *Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story* by Kevin Noble Maillard, illustrated by Juana Martinez-Neal
- *Stonewall: A Building. An Uprising. A Revolution* by Rob Sanders, illustrated by Jamey Christophe

"A Framework for Using Notable Social Studies Picture Books in High School" by Brianne Pitts, Jennifer Pontius-Vandenberg, and Darren Guido in *Social Education*, May/June 2023 (Vol. 87, #3, pp. 142-149)

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and 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
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 Ed (formerly Ed. Magazine)
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