

Marshall Memo 1059

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
October 28, 2024

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Quotes of the Week

“When adults are silent, students read this as condoning the behavior.”
Jenn David-Lang (see item #1)

“Principals look forward to PD days. Teachers dread them... It’s unlikely, however, that principals and teacher have dramatically different visions for teaching and learning. They likely agree that rich, engaging, empowering learning experiences for students are at the heart of what’s relevant. [Yet] the pressure and discourse of accountability, differentiation, intervention, and raising test scores continue to hijack the ability of school leaders and teacher teams to follow through on that commitment.”

Jessica Calabrese and Elham Kazemi in [“Most Teachers Don’t Think PD Is Relevant. What Can Principals Do?”](#) in *Education Week*, October 22, 2024

“Exit interviews are a bit of a joke. People usually assume it’s too late to address why they are leaving, so they say safe things and move on.”

Ethan Bernstein, Michael Horn, and Bob Moesta (see item #7)

“People do their best work if someone is watching and providing feedback... We have ample evidence that schools work better and kids learn more when content standards are joined by testing and accountability. Yet the pushback against accountability is relentless – nobody really likes being audited, evaluated, or judged by their results – and today it’s yielding ground.”

Chester Finn, Jr. in [“Once a Hedgehog, Now a Fox: Ten Lessons from Six Decades in the Struggle to Improve Schools”](#) in *Education Gadfly*, October 24, 2024

“Going into classrooms or debate tournaments as one of a handful of students of color, with an unusual name, and then also knocking it out of the park, meant that people remembered me. It did take fortitude to not feel daunted by being different. But I just decided that I would put all my effort into being as good as I could be.”

KetANJI Brown Jackson in [“Life’s Work,”](#) an interview with Alison Beard in *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 2024 (Vol. 102, #6, p. 160)

1. Gearing Up for the Election

In this article in *The Main Idea*, Jenn David-Lang suggests five ways school leaders can prepare colleagues and students for the U.S. election next week. “You may remember the fallout from the last two elections,” she says. “We need to plan ways to communicate clearly, set expectations, and create a calm and inclusive environment while thinking through ways to address challenges that may arise – heightened emotions, legal issues, inappropriate behavior.”

- *Communicate clearly and proactively.*
 - Connect the school’s mission and values to what is expected from everyone.
 - Set guidelines on how staff members discuss politics (remaining neutral yet morally clear), respond to inappropriate comments and behavior, and model good listening.
 - Share resources for students and family members and remain calm, open-minded, inclusive, curious, and thoughtful.
- *Foster respectful and inclusive classrooms as a foundation for difficult conversations.*
 - Teachers should reinforce norms about civil discourse: “Criticize ideas, not people.”
 - Normalize and plan for disagreement – it’s natural under the circumstances.
 - Introduce students to responses like “Say more about that” and “Fist of fives” to express levels of agreement and disagreement.
 - Organize morning meetings, circles, and town halls to talk about the issues.
 - Actively teach discussion and debating skills.
 - Build the skills of empathy – “Imagine what it would feel like if you were...” “What I heard you say was...” Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
 - Provide thinking/reflection/wait time so people can think through their responses.
- *Anticipate and address heightened emotions.*
 - On election day, consider a ten-minute staff check-in meeting “just to breathe together.”
 - Give staff space to talk about their emotions and opinions; there may be a wide range.
 - Have colleagues share tips for handling their own feelings and those in their classes.
 - Set up a schoolwide structure for the day after, perhaps first period for older students to write and younger students to draw – something open-ended to get emotions out.
 - Establish forums for conversations – perhaps a homeroom meeting, community circle, or town hall.
 - Have teachers conduct mini-lessons on identifying and managing strong emotions.

- Suggest a simple structure – for example, *Head* (What facts do I understand about this election?), *Heart* (What are my emotions about it?), and *Conscience* (What does this mean for me?).
- *Use the election as an opportunity for growth and learning.*
 - This is a chance to see U.S. civics and government in action, warts and all.
 - Media literacy is a natural topic.
 - Teachers can capitalize on students’ interest by offering five minutes of current events every day.
 - Mock elections might be appropriate in some classes, grades, and schools.
- *Address challenges and legal issues.*
 - Don’t ignore insensitive, inappropriate, or bullying behavior. “When adults are silent,” says David-Lang, “students read this as condoning the behavior.”
 - Refresh your knowledge of legal guidelines, including the 1969 Tinker decision supporting student free speech in public schools that is not disruptive.
 - Be present throughout the school – in hallways, in the cafeteria, before and after classes.

[“5 Ways School Leaders Can Prepare for a Contentious Election”](#) by Jenn David-Lang in *The Main Idea*, October 25, 2024; David-Lang can be reached at Jenn@TheMainIdea.net.

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2. Dealing with Imposter Syndrome in the Workplace

In this article in *Communiqué*, Janise Parker (William & Mary), Alexa Austin (Baton Rouge Schools), Kamontá Heidelberg (Ohio State University), and Yi-Yun Minnie Tsai (William & Mary) explore imposter syndrome, defined as “persistent feelings of incompetence or intellectual phoniness despite one’s high achievement, demonstrated talents, and success.” This can lead people to procrastinate, over-prepare, feel anxious, and believe they aren’t worthy when they succeed.

Parker, Austin, Heidelberg, and Tsai suggest four ways that professionals can counteract these tendencies:

- *Critical consciousness* – It’s helpful to step back from personal insecurities and see the history and social origins that can trigger imposter syndrome common for certain groups. Individuals need to speak up about actions that make them feel they don’t belong, advocate for changes in workplace conditions that perpetuate unfair treatment, pursue leadership roles to expand their impact, and set boundaries to prioritize their health versus overworking to prove their worth.

- *Cultural appreciation and affirmation* – Educators of color might be caught up in what W.E.B. Du Bois described as “double consciousness” – trying to maintain their cultural heritage while conforming to workplace norms of language, “professionalism,” and attire. The trick, say Parker, Austin, Heidelberg, and Tsai, is to see “how their cultural identity can uniquely position them to understand and serve students, families, and communities in

transformative ways... introducing novel ways of thinking and solving problems as they address complex issues in the 21st century.”

- *Celebration and compassion for self* – Perfectionism goes hand in hand with imposter syndrome, say the authors, so it’s “important to remember that making mistakes, encountering demanding situations, and not having all the answers are inevitable” – as well as sometimes feeling unintelligent or incompetent. They advise asking for guidance and help on specific tasks and taking advantage of relevant professional learning opportunities. Affirming self-talks can also be effective: *Today I feel empowered. Today I made a difference. Today I am worthy. Today I have something to offer. Today I can do this.* (Collins et al.)

- *Collective and communal care* – People often deal with imposter syndrome in isolation, not realizing that people around them may be having the same issues. Joining informal affinity groups can make all the difference, along with mentoring colleagues and encouraging them to advance in the field (*Lifting as we climb*) and raising administrators’ consciousness about the issue so they do a better job supporting and encouraging everyone.

“From Imposter Syndrome to Healing and Liberation” by Janise Parker, Alexa Austin, Kamontá Heidelberg, and Yi-Yun Minnie Tsai in *Communiqué*, November 2024 (Vol. 53, #3, pp. 20-23); Parker can be reached at jparker@wm.edu.

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3. How Leaders Can Take In Feedback

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Ethan Burriss and Benjamin Thomas (University of Texas/Austin) and Ketaki Sodhi and Dawn Klinghoffer (Microsoft) say there’s been a major effort in the corporate world to listen to employees’ concerns – surveys, focus groups, listening tours, town halls, and more. The problem is that many leaders don’t know what to do with all that feedback and struggle to translate it into meaningful action. The result: people get cynical and stop responding when asked for input.

From interviews with more than two dozen companies, Burriss, Thomas, Doshi, and Klinghoffer identify common challenges with using feedback and suggest strategies for overcoming each one.

- *Making sense of the data* – There’s too much input to form a coherent impression of what’s going on, and what happens in some situations, say the authors, is that “a few vivid anecdotes proved so memorable that leaders attached themselves to the experiences of a handful of people who were unrepresentative of the workforce as a whole.” The solution is to delegate responsibility for analyzing feedback and distilling clear, cogent conclusions.

- *Making sure employees feel heard* – “People won’t speak up if they don’t believe their input will be genuinely considered,” say the authors. “‘Survey fatigue’ is a misnomer. Rather, employees experience ‘inaction fatigue’, and harnessing their voices requires a long-term investment in building and sustaining trust that their feedback will make a difference.” The key is tuning in on the feedback, summarizing results for everyone to see, quoting some individuals’ comments, and following up promptly.

- *Identifying the underlying problem* – Sometimes a survey surfaces complaints that aren't the real issue, and follow-up is needed to get to the heart of the matter. The risk is over-surveying employees, but the extra digging is essential. A focus group might be the best approach.

- *Protecting privacy* – Confidentiality is essential if people are going to be honest about difficult issues, but leaders need the details. How can they follow up in ways that don't seem like an inquisition or a hunt to root out malcontents? The key is building trust that individual responses will not be held against anyone.

- *Navigating conflicting views* – “Gathering feedback from numerous voices rarely results in unanimous agreement,” say Burris, Thomas, Sodhi, and Klinghoffer. “All too often a significant portion of employees will be unsatisfied with any course of action leadership chooses.” When feedback is all over the map, it's best for leaders to acknowledge the lack of consensus, be transparent about the decision-making process, and show how various viewpoints influenced the final decision.

- *Not burying bad news* – For leaders, negative feedback can hurt. It's especially frustrating to be criticized for something over which you have no control, or to be pushed to go in a direction with which you disagree. The temptation is to ignore or minimize the comments, so it's important to have critical friends within the organization who help leaders address what's being said and see how it might be worth paying attention to.

- *Providing meaningful follow-up* – Let's say people have identified a problem that requires significant changes in the organization. That means shifting resources, redirecting colleagues, and saying no to other efforts – perhaps someone's favorite project. Leaders need to say what they've heard and tell colleagues where we are, where we're going based on the feedback, and when we'll next check in to see how things are going.

[“Turn Employee Feedback Into Action”](#) by Ethan Burris, Benjamin Thomas, Ketaki Sodhi, and Dawn Klinghoffer in *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 2024 (Vol. 102, #6, pp. 54-60); Burris can be reached at ethan.burris@mcombs.utexas.edu.

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4. Restorative Justice in Five Illinois High Schools

In this article in *Urban Education*, Remy Stewart and Jerel Ezell (Cornell University) say that traditional discipline policies “have been widely critiqued by educators and researchers, for both their overall ineffectiveness in mitigating conflict and for their discriminatory outcomes towards black students.” Stewart and Ezell studied the implementation of an alternative in five Chicago-area high schools: restorative justice, which emphasizes mediation, conciliation, and healing over suspensions and expulsions.

Interviews with 32 staff in these high schools showed that the majority generally supported the ideological principles of restorative justice, and many staff members embraced it as a way to reduce the racial disproportionality of punitive discipline and build a positive school culture. Administrators were the most enthusiastic about the initiative, and some

educators, especially younger teachers of color, implemented the ideas in their classrooms and saw a huge difference. “Guess what?” said one. “Those kids in my classroom will probably never fight each other.”

But other staff members, many of them more-experienced, white, and Latin educators, had major reservations (security staff were the most skeptical). Six concerns emerged from the interviews:

- The egalitarian ethos of restorative justice – Some saw a shift from the familiar hierarchical dynamic between students and adults. “Teenagers feel like we’re on an equal plane,” said one administrator, “and I think adults struggle with that.” He said students need to be “down here,” gesturing toward the floor, to maintain discipline in the school.

- Not preparing students for the “nonrestorative real world” – “I don’t need to love a student week one to move them forward,” said a teacher, “and I think that’s a problem here. I don’t praise them for doing something they should be doing... In the real world that does not happen. I don’t want to set our students up for unrealistic expectations outside this building.”

- Perceived weak responses to major disciplinary infractions – “There’s no consequences whatsoever here,” said an administrator. “Everything is either a peace circle, a restorative conversation, but nothing if those things don’t work... We’re not really doing any of the mix of punitive and restorative. I think there is value in those things.”

- Inadequate financial and staff resources – These high schools didn’t have the staff to adequately address the many restorative conferences that were called for, as well as the classroom lessons to bring students around to a different mindset about behavior and address serious interpersonal issues.

- Insufficient attention to students’ emotional challenges – Many staff members said that much student misbehavior stemmed from deep-seated mental health issues and outside-school trauma that could not possibly be addressed by counselors and psychologists within their buildings.

- Not differentiating with lower-level disciplinary problems – Some teachers felt that when a student defiantly continued to use her cellphone during class, that didn’t call for a restorative conversation – just an immediate consequence.

“Ideological support for restorative justice does not directly assume ideal program implementation,” say Stewart and Ezell. Staff members in these schools said they liked the concept, but only when it was supported by a complete restorative culture within their schools. “This sweeping acceptance of restorative justice,” continue the authors, “does not occur in practice within the reality of divergent personal opinions and levels of buy-in from teachers, administrators, and security staff... Staff members often simply did not know how to incorporate restorative justice into their work as well, and commonly held the inaccurate perception that restorative justice completely replaced the option of using punitive discipline within their school district.”

Stewart and Ezell believe restorative justice has great potential to change the negative spiral of discipline problems and racially skewed punishments, but believe four elements need to be in place for successful implementation:

- Strengthening institutional support via funding, resources, and staffing;
- Promoting staff understanding and buy-in through training and school leadership;
- Addressing structural inequities that promote discrimination;
- Focusing on student mental health.

“Proactively engaging with both the barriers within schools as well as the fundamental causes behind the systemic inequities that undermine restorative approaches,” conclude the authors, “is essential to address the ongoing prevalence of racial disparities in disciplinary outcomes that is still found within schools that adopt restorative justice.”

[“Understanding Perceptions, Barriers, and Opportunities Around Restorative Justice in Urban High Schools”](#) by Remy Stewart and Jerel Ezell in *Urban Education*, November 2024 (Vol. 59, #9, pp. 2619-2648); Stewart can be reached at rps256@cornell.edu.

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5. An Elementary School Grapples with Low Math Achievement

In this article in *Educational Researcher*, Carlos Sandoval, Jr. (WestEd), Angel Xiao Bohannon (Northwestern University and University of Chicago), and Joshua Michael (University of Maryland/Baltimore and Sherman Family Foundation) describe their study of an urban elementary school’s effort to improve mathematics achievement. The authors analyze this school’s continuous improvement work in terms of three “power moves”:

- *Focusing on standardized test scores* – In a summer meeting, teachers were presented with a graph of the state math test proficiency levels of their students for the previous year: 22.7 percent of third graders, 24.7 percent of fourth graders, and 20 percent of fifth graders. “The school administrators could have chosen to focus on something else,” say Sandoval, Bohannon, and Michael. “The focus of improvement work could have been on an aim that was more justice-focused – for example, improving the affirmation of black and brown students’ identities in mathematics.” But school leaders chose the coin of the realm: state test scores. Teachers were discouraged, saying they didn’t know “where to go from here,” and that the test results didn’t reflect their students’ actual achievement.

- *Changing the data display* – Teachers were then presented with a different data display showing the percent of students at or near proficiency (50 percent) and asked about the implications for instruction for all students. Teachers said this was much more in line with what they were seeing in their classrooms; “Just about half of my students grasp lessons,” said one. “By framing the new data display to think about how teachers could support ‘all students’ across the range of levels,” say the researchers, “teachers began to generate more-specific ideas around what they could do for students in each level.”

- *Teachers’ responses* – The second display of student test results shifted the conversation, empowering teachers to look closely at where students were not successful and roll up their sleeves and plan specific ways they could improve all students’ math proficiency. This approach was far more effective than the first, say the researchers, and also better than disaggregating student test data by race, class, and gender. The focus was where it should be:

specific math skills that needed more-effective instruction with specific students – *name and need*. Handling continuous improvement efforts in this way, say the researchers, is the best way to advance equity and social justice.

[“Examining Power Through Practice in Continuous Improvement in Education”](#) by Carlos Sandoval, Jr., Angel Xiao Bohannon, and Joshua Michael in *Educational Researcher*, October 2024 (Vol. 53, #7, pp. 420-425); Sandoval can be reached at carloss4@uci.edu.

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6. How the Pandemic Fostered Enduring Classroom Changes

In this article in *Teachers College Record*, Sharon Yee, a sociology professor at Glendale Community College in Arizona, says Covid-19 “offered a chance to critically evaluate how my pedagogical choices impacted barriers students face in completing their education.” She made ten changes that she’s continued to use since in-person instruction resumed:

- Making courses accessible on students’ phones and tablets;
- Incorporating audio transcripts;
- Using additional video formats;
- Finding ways to engage students’ families and children;
- Addressing students’ anxieties;
- Offering more choices of assignments;
- Using free Open Educational Resources;
- Allowing more flexibility on assignment deadlines;
- Extending submission times;
- Offering an accelerated version of courses.

Here is more detail, tagging ideas to the titles and lines from popular songs:

- “We Gotta Start Makin’ Changes” by Tupac (Hornsby et al., 1998) – Prior to the pandemic, Yee accepted assignments as a PDF or text box submission, giving students instructions on creating PDFs and using the learning management system to submit work via their phones. But when Covid hit, she knew she needed to go further.

- “Watch Me on Your Video Phone” by Beyoncé (Beyince et al., 2009) – Yee began to use more videos in her courses, catering to her mostly Gen Z students, including videos of her lectures, making sure everything was accessible on phones and tablets and suitable to being shared with family members.

- “Help Me Get My Feet Back on the Ground” by The Beatles (Lennon & McCartney, 1965) – Yee’s students have always had anxieties about assignment logistics, expectations, content, time management, and critical thinking, and these were amped up during the pandemic. Now she includes with her course materials short how-to videos, suggestions on getting counseling, and other supports.

- “You Can Go Your Own Way” by Fleetwood Mac (Buckingham, 1977) – Yee began giving students choices on how they would demonstrate learning at the end of each module –

either a traditional test, a written assignment that demonstrated mastery, or a project. “These pedagogical decisions,” she says, “allowed students to assume control over demonstrating their knowledge.”

- “I Just Might Have a Problem That You’ll Understand” by Bill Withers (Withers, 1972) – Yee switched to a free online textbook for her sociology course, saving students significant financial outlays, and hasn’t looked back.

- “Cause I Can’t Wait Much Longer” by Kanye West (Birdsong et al, 2007) – Starting during the pandemic and continuing since, Yee has offered compressed courses, which allow students to cover the same content in less time.

- “If You Fall, I Will Catch You” by Cindy Lauper (Lauper & Hyman, 1983) – Yee used to have a no-excuses policy on late assignments, but during Covid she made several changes: setting her deadline during the school day (versus at 11:59 p.m.) to allow for communication on last-minute problems; allowing for a limited number of late submissions (with a plan for completing it); and giving students the option of using a “Life Happens” card in dire emergencies.

- “Teachers Keep on Teachin’” by Stevie Wonder (Wonder, 1973) – This song sums up her evolving philosophy of teaching, which has been very well received by students and resulted in improved academic results.

[“A Change Is Gonna Come’: Pedagogical Shifts in a Post-Covid World”](#) by Sharon Yee in *Teachers College Record*, June 2024 (Vol. 126, #6-7, pp. 78-90); Yee can be reached at sharon.yee@gccaz.edu.

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7. Preventing Good People from Quitting Their Jobs

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Ethan Bernstein (Harvard Business School), Michael Horn (Clayton Christensen Institute), and Bob Moesta (The ReWired Group) address the issue of employee attrition. “To stick around and keep giving their best,” they say, “people need meaningful work; managers and colleagues who value, respect, and trust them; and opportunities to grow, excel, and advance in their careers.”

From extensive research and interviewing in a range of workplaces, Bernstein, Horn, and Moesta have zeroed in on four reasons people quit a job:

- To escape a bad situation – toxic culture, awful manager, bad fit, tough commute;
- To get more control over their work life – most often flexibility or predictability;
- To feel better respected and valued – using all their talents and experience;
- To move on to a new milestone – this might mean more responsibility or higher pay.

“Exit interviews are a bit of a joke,” say the authors. “People usually assume it’s too late to address why they are leaving, so they say safe things and move on.” Better for managers to be proactive and intervene early so a valuable person won’t suddenly quit:

- *Interview people about why they left their previous job.* This gives valuable insights about their values, pushes and pulls, and what would motivate them to stick around in their current situation.

- *Develop “shadow” job descriptions.* In addition to the official job description for a role, managers need a clear sense of what the person will actually *do* in the job they’re being hired for and the specific talents and skills they’ll need to make a valuable contribution. When there’s a match, the person is more likely to be happy, productive, and stay.

- *Huddle with HR.* The Human Resources department should be on board with this philosophy of keeping people happy and productive, and be flexible in crafting job descriptions.

[“Why Employees Quit”](#) by Ethan Bernstein, Michael Horn, and Bob Moesta in *Harvard Business Review*, November-December 2024 (Vol. 102, #6, pp. 44-54); Bernstein can be reached at e@hbs.edu.

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8. Recommended Books on Native American History

In this *Literary Hub* article, Kathleen DuVal (University of North Carolina/Chapel Hill), author of *Native Nations: A Millenium in North America*, recommends five books on Native American history, all written by Native authors (click the link below for cover images and brief synopses):

- *The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present* by David Treuer
- *The Rediscovery of America: Native Peoples and the Unmaking of U.S. History* by Ned Blackhawk
- *Holding Our World Together: Ojibwe Women and the Survival of Community* by Brenda Child
- *Indians in Unexpected Places* by Philip Deloria
- *Postcolonial Love Poem* by Natalie Diaz

[“Five Essential Books for Understanding Native American History”](#) by Kathleen DuVal in *Literary Hub*, October 17, 2024

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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 54 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 HTML 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 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
Language Magazine
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