

Marshall Memo 1001

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 4, 2023

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Quotes of the Week

"Why can't real life be more like summer camp? It can be, and already is (at least in some respects) for young people lucky enough to attend schools that are focused on helping them grow into the best possible versions of themselves. When learning is active, immersive, and meaningful, kids become fluent in addressing real-world problems. In these schools, trust, strong relationships, and a healthy, respectful community are prioritized as much or more than test scores."

Andy Calkins in a *New York Times* letter, September 1, 2023

"Everything that is good in this country, everything that is worthy in this country, everything that is beautiful in this country, begins with a teacher."

Kurt Russell, 2022 National Teacher of the Year, at the 2023 Educators Rising Conference, quoted in *Kappan*, September 2023 (Vol. 105, #1, p. 5)

"I encourage educators – especially in high schools and colleges – to assume that 100 percent of their students are using ChatGPT and other generative A.I. tools on every assignment, in every subject, unless they're being physically supervised inside a school building."

Kevin Roose in ["How Schools Can Cope and Grow When Their Students Are Using A.I."](#) in *The New York Times*, August 29, 2023

"ChatGPT isn't a threat because it fixes spelling and grammar or tells students how to be more concise or expressive. It's a threat because, when used thoughtlessly, it replaces the *creation* of ideas."

Matthew Kay (see item #4)

“Perhaps ChatGPT’s greatest advantage as a writing partner is that it does not struggle with writing anxiety, nor the ensuing feelings of negative self-efficacy. It is not distractible, and it will never suffer from writer’s block.”

Sarah Beck and Sarah Levine in [“ChatGPT: A Powerful Technology Tool for Writing Instruction”](#) in *Kappan*, September 2023 (Vol. 105, #1, pp. 66-67)

“As a teacher, if I’m asking questions that are easily answered by A.I., am I asking the best questions?”

New Jersey educator Jennifer Parnell (quoted in item #3)

1. The Teacher of the Year Who Almost Didn’t Make It

In this *Kappan* interview with Kathleen Vail, this year’s National Teacher of the Year Rebecka Peterson describes what saved her during a very rocky first year teaching math at Union High School in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She happened to find the *One Good Thing* blog, which challenged teachers to find something positive in every day, no matter how badly things had gone. She liked the idea and halfway through that year, started posting a positive thought at the end of every day.

At first it was difficult to think of anything good, says Peterson, but then there was a shift. “I would notice good things throughout the day. Johnny asked a question today – one good thing. I started writing them down throughout the day so that I wouldn’t forget... When I took the time to notice the good, the part of my brain that filtered the good expanded and allowed me to see more good things. Eventually, I reached a turning point where I wanted to not just actively notice the good. I wanted to proactively create the good. I wanted to be the one good thing for my students. I went from reactive to active to proactive. One good thing, one step at a time, one day at a time, one blog post at a time. And it changed my life.” A decade later, she had written 1,400 posts.

Peterson likens the process to exponential growth in mathematics – starting slowly, gradually gathering steam – and that’s become her teaching philosophy. “We don’t always feel that change right at the beginning,” she says, “but what a shame to stop those practices in the beginning, and not experience the uptick.”

Isn’t this just toxic positivity, desperately looking for the silver lining when it’s not there? Not so, says Peterson. “This is taking ownership of our story.” A day might be going poorly – the lesson plan bombs and 20 minutes are lost because someone pulls a fire alarm – but one student says good morning in a way that melts her heart, and she knows why she’s there. “It’s so easy to focus on the bad,” she says, “and if we’re not careful, we will start a

downward spiral. Gratitude jolts us out of that spiral. Gratitude gave me eyes to see what I was missing before... small, everyday moments that I was missing before I was intentional about noticing them and documenting them. It's making room for the good things to land."

Peterson has asked her students to adopt *One Good Thing*. Every Friday she puts on music and they get out their math notebooks, turn to the last page, and silently write one good thing that happened that week – a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph. Some students write to her after they graduate saying they've continued the practice.

For several years, Peterson looped with her students from precalculus to calculus, so most of them knew her well as they began the most challenging math course of high school. Students who had looped told the newbies, "She's going to push us, but it'll be fine," and results were excellent. Then the schedule changed; Peterson was teaching calculus without the benefit of looping and worried that students wouldn't do as well.

That's when she began telling her story (she's the child of Swedish and Iranian medical missionaries and came to the U.S. as a preschooler), then invited students to sit with her before or after school or over lunch and tell their stories. Every year it takes ten weeks to hear 100 teenagers' tales, but doing this "softened me," says Peterson. "When we learn each other's stories, we carry a piece of each other with us. I carried my students with me every time I stepped into my classroom. My patience and my grace grew tremendously because I knew their backgrounds... I can feel the atmospheric shift. Because everyone is in. Everyone belongs. Everyone has a seat at the table. There's this inherent trust, and it allows me to push them mathematically. And then they soar; they just soar."

["One Good Thing, One Day At a Time: A Conversation with Rebecka Peterson"](#) by Kathleen Vail in *Kappan*, September 2023 (Vol. 105, #1, pp. 8-12)

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2. Ideas for Lesson "Bookends"

In this *Edutopia* article, Andrew Boryga says beginning-of-class routines can set students up to engage in the content they're about to learn. Some possibilities:

- Rapid retrieval – Pairs of students huddle, summarize what they learned in the previous class, and then present to the larger group.
- A misconception quiz – The class takes a quick true/false test on an incorrect fact or concept in the unit they're studying, then discusses why it's wrong.
- A visual hook – Students view a short video, photo, or text that will pique their interest in what they're about to study.
- Vocabulary splashes – Students get words and definitions from previous lessons and upcoming content, sort them in a way that makes sense, and discuss with an elbow partner.
- A low-stakes quiz – A short test of students' understanding of foundational material informs instruction for students and the teacher.

- Brain dump – Students have 1-2 minutes to write everything they know – or think they know – about the upcoming topic and then work in groups to identify similarities, differences, and gaps.

Boryga then offers suggestions for ways to end a lesson that consolidate learning while giving the teacher helpful feedback:

- Rate the lesson – On a 1-10 scale, students indicate how well they understood the content. With 6-10 ratings, they jot down key learnings, with 1-5 ratings, they jot down what’s missing.
- Two-dollar summary – With each word worth ten cents, students write a 20-word summary of the most important thing they learned, in language that would be understandable to a first grader.
- Clear and cloudy – Students write what they understand and what’s still unclear.
- Signal your knowledge – On a continuum laid out on the floor, students stand at their self-assessed level of understanding. Alternatively, students write and post sticky notes on a continuum on the board saying what they get, almost get, and don’t get.
- News headlines – Working in pairs, students summarize the most important concept they learned that day in snappy six-word bulletins.
- Rock, paper, scissors – Students play the game, identifying the rocks (hardest to understand), the main idea (paper), and less-important details (scissors).
- Quiz the next class – At the end of a unit, students come up with multiple-choice questions on key understandings for a class about to learn the same content.
- Beachball questions – The beachball with questions written on it – *What is one thing you learned today? What was challenging about today’s lesson?* and others – bounces around the class and students answer the question their right hand touches.

[“14 Effective Opening and Closing Routines for Teachers”](#) by Andrew Boryga in *Edutopia*, August 25, 2023

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3. Beginning the First Full School Year with A.I. Bots

In this *New York Times* article, education technology reporter Natasha Singer shares some responses she’s received from educators and students about ChatGPT and other A.I. large language models:

- A University of Washington professor said she’s using them to generate variations of quiz questions, check her instructions for clarity, and brainstorm ideas for activities and assignments.
- A Southern Methodist University instructor has her students think about what’s worth knowing before using ChatGPT, decide what information and research is worth “outsourcing,” and critically examine and fine-tune what the bot produces.

- A Massachusetts ninth grader described ChatGPT as his “personalized tutor in math,” helping him prepare for geometry classes this year. “You can ask it a million questions and it never gets tired,” he said.
- A recent graduate of the University of Iowa said A.I. is making it much easier for students to get simple explanations of difficult concepts. “The tailored responses one can obtain through specific prompts are incredible,” he wrote. “It can provide students with endless examples of how to outline essays, business plans, and e-mails. It’s a real time-saver.”
- A first-year student at Wheaton College lamented that the bots can provide a shortcut to the important process of thinking deeply about a text and making personal connections. “I just don’t want it to make students lazy,” she said, “as the joy of learning is that ‘Aha!’ moment that comes from figuring something out yourself.”
- An assistant dean at Northwestern University said “the very best students will be fine,” but sees the danger of “an ever-yawning gap between the privileged and everyone else, between those who know how to use A.I. as a tool and those who don’t know that there is anything to know.”
- A University of Pennsylvania professor advised instructors to give in-class exams with the WiFi turned off and laptops in demo mode. He also urged students to demand clarity on their school’s policy: “Does this mean that I’m allowed to use A.I. to generate ideas? Could A.I. come up with an outline that I work on? Can I ask for feedback from A.I. on my work? Am I allowed to use A.I. as a teammate? Can I ask the A.I. advice for something? Can I ask to explain why I got a question right or wrong?”
- A New Jersey high-school history teacher said, “A.I. has pushed teachers to think more intentionally about the purpose of education and specifically assessment. As a teacher, if I’m asking questions that are easily answered by A.I., am I asking the best questions?”

[“Taking the Pulse of Teachers and Students on A.I.”](#) by Natasha Singer in *The New York Times*, August 28, 2023

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4. How to Keep Kids Honest Now That They Can Use ChatGPT

(Originally titled “Grading Writing Just Got Weird”)

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Philadelphia teacher Matthew Kay says the new A.I. bots have made grading students’ written assignments a lot trickier. In his high-school classes, says Kay, “writing is an important way for students to show me – and each other – how they are thinking. ChatGPT isn’t a threat because it fixes spelling and grammar or tells students how to be more concise or expressive. It’s a threat because, when used thoughtlessly, it replaces the *creation* of ideas. If writing cannot be reasonably assumed to represent a student’s thinking, it loses most of its scholarly value.”

Right now, standard plagiarism detection tools can’t reliably detect students’ A.I.-produced writing, says Kay, but he believes he’s found a way to spot students taking shortcuts:

- Add the Draftback extension your Google Chrome browser.
- Require students to give teachers edit access to the Google Doc of every major piece of writing, and have students commit to doing all parts of every draft on the same Google Doc.
- Draftback turns a document’s revision history into a video that can be played at controllable speeds, which allows the teacher to see every keystroke a student makes on a piece of writing.
- Draftback also gives a detailed breakdown of a document’s history, including every revision, the number of “distinct writing sessions,” the time and duration of each session, and which user made them.
- This allows the teacher to review each student’s revisions on a piece of writing and compare it to the average for that type of assignment.
- If something seems fishy, the teacher can play the history of the document back at quick speed, looking for moments when chunks of text appear from nowhere.
- If that happened, a one-on-one chat with the student is in order: “Help me understand this. What happened here?”
- The bottom line: for students to game the system, they would have to put in more time than it would take to produce authentic writing.
- Draftback is also helpful for students to monitor and think about their own writing steps by watching the video of their revisions.

Another practice, which Kay believes is a good idea anyway, is having students submit successive drafts of their essays for feedback.

[“Grading Writing Just Got Weird”](#) by Matthew Kay in *Educational Leadership*, September 2023 (Vol. 81, #1, pp. 76-77); Kay can be reached at mrkay@notlight.com.

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5. Analyzing Fourth-Grade Teachers’ Feedback to Their Students

In this *Elementary School Journal* article, Elizabeth Stevens (University of Kansas), Philip Capin, Elizabeth Swanson, and Sharon Vaughn (University of Texas/Austin), and Alicia Stewart (University of North Carolina/Charlotte) report on the types of feedback that 33 Texas fourth-grade teachers gave their students during social studies lessons (which were mostly PowerPoint presentations accompanied by class discussions):

- Repeating students’ answers (39.8%)
- Positive comments, mostly unspecific – e.g., “That’s right.” (32.2%)
- Corrections, mostly unspecific – e.g., “Incorrect.” (11.8%)
- Praise, mostly general – for example, “Great job” (15.6%)
- Positive comments combined with corrections – (0.5%)

The researchers note that there was considerable variation among teachers: one teacher repeated students’ answers 65 times while another did so only once; one teacher praised students 28 times while another provided no praise.

Feedback is a research-proven way to improve student learning, say Stevens et al., “the vehicle through which teachers support students in narrowing the gap between their current understanding and the intended learning goal.” But in these classrooms, the feedback many students were getting was suboptimal.

For starters, repeating students’ correct answers (Teacher: “Who was the first person to establish a colony in Texas?” Student: “Stephen F. Austin.” Teacher: “Stephen F. Austin”) has problems: “Repeating a student’s answer does not provide clear information to the student on the accuracy of the response,” say the researchers. “For students with learning disabilities or English learners, it may be especially important to remove this guesswork by providing direct, immediate, and concise information while students learn content in general education settings.”

Stevens and her colleagues are also concerned about the non-specific nature of most teachers’ praise, positive comments, and corrections, and the way these responses focused more on the student than on the task or subject matter and the self-regulation skills students need to develop. The feedback conveyed by most of these teachers doesn’t tell the student *why* their answer is right or wrong, the *process* they used or didn’t use, and “does not communicate information regarding how the student is doing and where they need to go next.”

Stevens et al. provide examples of teacher feedback that focuses students on their goal, the instructional task, learning strategies, and self-regulation skills:

- *That’s correct. You identified the most important events leading up the battle.*
- *I like how you used the glossary in your textbook to find the definition of “culture.”*
- *You’ve been working on spelling social studies words correctly. I like how you went back and checked each of your words to be sure you spelled them correctly.*
- Teacher: *What was the battle called?* Student: *The Texas Revolution.* Teacher: *No, look at the paragraph in your textbook to find the name of the battle.*
- *Remember that we are working on writing complete sentences.*
- *You identified two of the concerns Texans felt about the annexation of Texas. Go back and reread to find the third concern.*

The best feedback helps students address three overall questions: *Where am I going? How am I doing? Where to next?*

“Our findings,” conclude the researchers, “illustrate the need for teachers to have a better understanding of the levels of feedback, the direction of feedback, and how and when to use feedback to improve students’ understanding... One way to accomplish this might be through teacher study teams or professional learning communities in which teachers (a) learn about the level and direction of feedback; (b) reflect on their use of feedback through video analysis; (c) collaborate with each other on ways to improve the level and specificity of feedback (e.g., combine positive feedback with corrective feedback, use positive specific feedback targeting the task or process instead of unspecific positive feedback or praise); and (d) set goals for using specific types of feedback.” Teachers should also increase their use of project-based and team-based learning to create more opportunities for higher-level feedback.

[“Examining the Type and Direction of Teacher Feedback Provided in Fourth-Grade Classrooms to Inform Teacher Preparation”](#) by Elizabeth Stevens, Philip Capin, Alicia

Steward, Elizabeth Swanson and Sharon Vaughn in *Elementary School Journal*, September 2023 (Vol. 124, #1, pp. 109-128); Stevens can be reached at lizstevens@ku.edu.

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6. Jim Knight on Why “Coachsplaining” Doesn’t Work

(Originally Titled “Stop Coachsplaining!”)

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Jim Knight (Instructional Coaching Group/ University of Kansas) has a word for when an instructional coach persists in telling a resistant teacher what to do: *coachsplaining*. Even if the coach has research-based reasons for making a recommendation, Knight says *back off*. Here’s why:

- *Coachsplaining doesn’t account for complexity*. “The reality,” he says, “is that most classrooms are so complex that a humble, adaptive approach is more effective.”

- *Coachsplaining barks up the wrong tree*. Telling a teacher how to teach is less effective than asking teachers what they want for their students and then observing how students are doing. “Teacher goals focused on students strengthening their achievement or behavior,” says Knight, “provide a way to measure whether strategies are working and monitor progress.”

- *Coachsplaining makes teachers feel like subordinates*. When coaches insist on a particular way of teaching and encounter resistance, they are saying they’re more important than the teacher – and the teacher will probably stop listening.

- *Coachsplaining saps motivation*. “Telling people what their goal is doesn’t lead to commitment,” says Knight. “Real change starts from the inside out.”

- *Coachsplaining short-circuits learning*. It tells teachers that they aren’t capable of solving their own problems. “Doing the thinking for teachers,” says Knight, “creates dependence, inhibits learning, and deprofessionalizes teaching.”

“When a coach starts by asking teachers what *they* think,” Knight concludes, “and listening with curiosity rather than speaking to gain control, that coach is more likely to do what’s best for students and teachers.”

[“Stop Coachsplaining!”](#) by Jim Knight in *Educational Leadership*, September 2023 (Vol. 81, #1, pp. 78-79); Knight can be reached at jimknight@mac.com.

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7. How to Deal with FOPO (Fear of Other People’s Opinions)

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Michael Gervais says that the higher people rise on the career ladder, the more susceptible they are to FOPO – Fear of Other People’s Opinions. In his work as a performance psychologist with athletes and professionals, Gervais has found that FOPO is a “hidden epidemic” that “may be the single greatest constrictor of individual and collective potential.” This perennial source of anxiety has been amped up by social media and a data-driven culture with accountability for results.

A person with FOPO is constantly aware of signals of rejection, says Gervais – “body language, micro-expressions, words, silence, actions, and inactions... It is not the actual

negative opinion that is so problematic – it’s the fear of it.” It’s normal to care about what others think of us, but taken too far, he says, “we give up control of our own lives.” In the words of Lao Tzu, the founder of Taoism, “Care about what other people think and you will always be their prisoner.”

People’s identity is a “fertile breeding ground” for FOPO, says Gervais, but that depends on whether their sense of self is performance-based or purpose-based:

- Performance-based – Constantly comparing oneself to others and their opinions creates an anxious state in which identity is always contingent, there’s a looming fear of failure, and perfectionism haunts daily life.
- Purpose-based – Identity is internally derived, driven by what “has intrinsic value for you,” says Gervais, “but is also bigger than you.” Instead of worrying about what others think, the key question is, *Am I being true to my purpose?*

“The challenge for managers,” he believes, “is that most people have performance-based identities. To reduce FOPO, managers must find ways to shift people’s identity from performance to purpose.” He suggests two approaches:

- *Purpose-based teams* – Research shows that clearly communicating to each team how its work contributes to the overall purpose of the organization makes a big difference. Focusing too much on meeting weekly or monthly data goals does the opposite, says Gervais, driving teams to a performance orientation that leaves them “anxious, burned out, and less effective at their jobs.” The leader’s role is getting everyone to focus on how their work contributes to the ultimate purpose. [In K-12 schools, that might be preparing students with the skills, knowledge, and beliefs that will help them succeed in the next grade.]

“This is a moment for modern leadership,” says Gervais. “Once you’ve established your team’s purpose, each time your employees experience FOPO, they will have a method for combating it. They can stop the repetitive, ruminative FOPO loop (*What will they think of me?*) and replace it with a measured response focused on the team’s purpose... Celebrate purpose-driven achievements. Highlight success stories that go beyond performance metrics. Encourage team members to imbue their work with meaning.”

- *Purpose-based colleagues* – Gervais suggests regular check-in meetings to foster each person’s sense of self, the ultimate purpose of their work, and how that is part of their team’s success. “For people with a purpose-based identity,” he says, “it’s not other people’s praise that drives them, it’s the meaning of what they’re doing and the impact they can make. One is sustainable, and the other will burn you out.”

[“Free Your People from the Need for Social Approval”](#) by Michael Gervais in *Harvard Business Review*, September/October 2023 (Vol. 101, #5, pp. 46-51)

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8. What Makes Someone a Productive Team Member?

In this article in *Harvard Magazine*, Max Krupnick reports on a study of the characteristics that make people effective members of teams. The researchers (David Deming

and Ben Weidmann of the Skills Lab) found that IQ, personality, education, ethnicity, and gender did not predict who was a good team player, nor did a high level of skill at the team's specific tasks. Rather, it was a set of skills that made some people "supercoordinators" of a team's work:

- Encouraging fellow team members to try harder;
- Scoping out who on the team is best at something and letting them do that task;
- Being good at identifying others' emotions – for example, noticing mental stress in a teammate.

Deming and Weidmann hope schools will spend more time teaching the skills of getting along and understanding one another, because jobs that involve teamwork are a rapidly expanding part of the U.S. workforce.

["Picking Team Players"](#) by Max Krupnick in *Harvard Magazine*, September-October 2023 (Vol. 126, #1, pp. 12-13)

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9. Some Positive Trends for U.S. Youth

(Originally titled "And Now for Some Good News")

In this *Educational Leadership* article, Bryan Goodwin (McREL International) acknowledges the many discouraging problems we face today – and then lists some ways that, according to Jean Twenge's 2023 book, *Generations*, today's students are in a better place than young people a few decades ago:

- *More commitment to inclusion and social justice* – "Educators' emphasis on such things as character education and cultural awareness appear to have molded a more compassionate, culturally aware, and socially accepting generation of young people," says Goodwin, including concern about LGBTQ rights and racial equity issues.

- *Less risky behavior* – Ninth graders who say they have tried alcohol dropped from 55 to 21 percent between 1993 and 2021. Twelfth graders who report having had sex dropped from 80 to 50 percent from 1980 to 2021. The percent of adolescents who say they "get a kick out of doing dangerous things" dropped from 52 to 38 percent from the mid-1990s to today.

- *Fewer teen births* – In the 1970s, there were 61.8 births per 1,000 teenage girls; in 2021, there were 14.4 births per 1,000.

- *More high-school college prep courses* – The number of students taking at least one AP course increased 57 percent from 2009 to 2019, and the number of students scoring high enough on an AP exam to earn college credit increased by 60 percent.

- *Higher college enrollment and completion* – This has been especially true for women and students of color. From 2000 to 2020, the percent of 25-to-29-year-olds with a college degree rose from 30 to 44 percent for women, from 27 to 35 percent for men. In 1968, 15 percent of African-American youth were enrolled in college; by 2018, that number was 38 percent.

[“And Now for Some Good News”](#) by Bryan Goodwin in *Educational Leadership*, September 2023 (Vol. 81, #1, pp. 84-85); Goodwin can be reached at bgoodwin@mcrel.org.

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10. Short Item:

PDK Poll – Here are [the results](#) of the 55th Annual Phi Delta Kappan Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward Public Schools.

“Continued Support for Teachers; Growing Support for a Four-Day School Week” in *Kappan*, September 2023 (Vol. 105, #1, pp. 34-39)

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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
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
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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