Marshall Memo 411

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
November 21, 2011

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"They are peculiar ducks, neither fish nor fowl. And you have to love them to really work with them. If you don't love them, you are up a tree."

Madeleine Brennan, New York City principal, on middle-school students (see item #7)

"Educators are often unaware of how they come across to low-income families. Low-income and minority parents often perceive teachers and principals as demanding a great deal from them and offering little in return."

William Jeynes in "Help Families by Fostering Parental Involvement" in *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 2011 (Vol. 93, #3, p. 38), http://www.kappanmagazine.org

"You tell students exactly what you want. Then, you rehearse and rehearse with feedback until it becomes habit. There is no magic to building culture; it's just hard work."

The principal of a KIPP school (see item #2)

"[E]ven the best pedagogy can't overcome the negative effects of incoherent curriculum, just as the best exercise regimen can't overcome the damage done by a diet of fast food."

Mike Schmoker (see item #1)

"I can't tell you how many frustrated PLCs I have seen that still can't see the root cause of their arrested development: the absence of coherent curriculum."

Mike Schmoker (*ibid.*)

1. Mike Schmoker on Building a Coherent Curriculum

In this call to action in *Kappan*, author/consultant Mike Schmoker says the single most important thing in highly effective schools, both here and abroad, is "a coherent, content-rich curriculum that abounds in opportunities for reading, writing, and discussion in every subject area." This, he says, is what improves students' reading skills, higher-order comprehension, test scores, and success in college and careers. *How* the curriculum is taught matters, says Schmoker. "But even the best pedagogy can't overcome the negative effects of incoherent curriculum, just as the best exercise regimen can't overcome the damage done by a diet of fast food."

One of the most important benefits of a coherent, common curriculum is that it paves the way for professional learning communities (PLCs) to become the "essential engine of continuous improvement." They can craft common interim assessments, analyze their students' achievement in real time, and improve teaching month by month. "I can't tell you how many frustrated PLCs I have seen that still can't see the root cause of their arrested development: the absence of coherent curriculum."

The problem, says Schmoker, is that very few schools have the kind of content he describes. "Many schools implement a test-prep curriculum that is nothing but a content-poor corruption of real curriculum," he writes. "The actual taught curriculum continues to depend, more than anything, on which teacher a student happens to get."

The Common Core State Standards are a good start, says Schmoker, but he agrees with two CCSS authors that there are still too many English language arts standards and we should "focus on the cornerstones" – specifically:

- A carefully selected sequence of increasingly complex texts within and across each course and grade level – books, essays, speeches, opinion pieces, newspaper and magazine articles, poems, and textbook pages;
- High-quality questions on those texts;
- Abundant opportunities for students to closely read, discuss, and write about the texts in response to the questions;
- Assigning writing that takes the form of arguments supporting claims with evidence as students analyze, explain, and research the topics they're studying;
- Devoting at least one week per grading period to helping students write a short research paper.

"Only this will ensure that they're college and career ready," says Schmoker.

For schools that don't already have this kind of curriculum, nothing is more important than putting it in place, and Schmoker suggests the following immediate steps:

- Have teacher teams reduce and identify the most essential content standards and topics for each course;
- Organize those topics by grading period;
- Choose interesting, content-rich texts for the content in each grading period;
- Continuously share the best work and texts with other teams and other schools;
- Don't worry about having a "perfect" curriculum. "Even rough, conscientious efforts here will result in more coherence and an invaluable selection of quality texts for most courses."

Schmoker is asking teacher teams to send him a good working curriculum for a single course – one that has a sequentially-arranged set of essential standards, divided by grading period, including the essential, common readings and the common, required writing assignments (e.g., one 3-page paper per semester). He'll share the best that he receives online as models for others. Send to schmoker@futureone.com.

"First Things First: Curriculum NOW" by Mike Schmoker in *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 2011 (Vol. 93, #3, p. 70-71), http://www.kappanmagazine.org

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2. How KIPP Schools Get Results

In this *Kappan* article, Robert Maranto and James Shuls of the University of Arkansas/ Fayetteville defend KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) schools against various criticisms, contending that they don't cream high-achieving students, they don't have higher attrition than regular public schools in their communities, and their old-fashioned "paternalism" seems to be working in terms of college admissions and downstream success. Focusing on the KIPP Delta School in a poverty-stricken area of Arkansas, they describe the key success factors:

• *Define the mission*. KIPP's goal is preparing students to enter and succeed in college, and that purpose is everywhere: college pennants, calling students "scholars," constantly emphasizing "climbing the mountain to college," referring to students' college graduation year (Class of 2023), speaking of the professions they will enter after college, and teachers chatting about their college experiences.

• *Hire for the mission*. KIPP looks for teachers who have a social-justice orientation and would disobey authority to help students.

• *Sweat the small stuff*. KIPP explicitly teaches routines in the three-week summer school and at the beginning of each school year, developing a culture where teaching and learning are not interrupted by discipline problems. "You build culture through establishing really clear expectations," says a KIPP principal, "and then you have to constantly reinforce those expectations. You tell students exactly what you want. Then, you rehearse and rehearse with feedback until it becomes habit. There is no magic to building culture; it's just hard work."

This includes how to organize their agenda books and homework files and clean up after lunch. By the second day of school, teachers are checking homework and calling parents

if necessary. Discipline infractions are dealt with immediately, as is a derisory titter at another student's wrong answer in a math class. For example, here's what one teacher said: "I will say this once and not again. In this class, laughter will never be used to make fun of another student. Laughter will be for joy, or occasionally it may be directed at me, but laughter will NEVER be used to make fun of another student or to divide this class, or you will have a problem with ME. Do I make myself clear?"

• *Develop schoolwide consistency*. Teachers use the same terms throughout the school, so "I didn't know" is not an excuse. "Work hard; be nice" is the schoolwide motto.

• *Build relationships*. Parents sign a "Commitment to Excellence" to academic success with their children and teachers and have their photograph taken with the document. Teachers make home visits and sometimes take family members out for dinner.

• *Give principals the power to lead*. KIPP principals control staff, budgets, and calendars, giving them considerably more freedom of action than regular public-school leaders.

• *Measure success frequently*. Constant feedback on assessments of learning is one of the keys to KIPP's success. One leader says that students wouldn't enjoy video games if they had to wait three months for their scores, so interim assessment results are available almost immediately.

"Lessons from KIPP Delta" by Robert Maranto and James Shuls in *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 2011 (Vol. 93, #3, p. 52-56), http://www.kappanmagazine.org

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3. Third-Grade Teachers Learn How to Use Math Interim Assessments

In this thoughtful article in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, consultant Jen Munson and professional developer Tamyka Morant describe a yearlong process of working with Grade 3 teacher teams around curriculum and assessments. Here are the steps they followed:

• *Defining the big math ideas* – These came down to 12-15 deep, conceptual math foci for each grade level, much broader than what Munson and Morant call the "atomized curriculum of isolated skills."

• *Developing high-quality assessment tasks* – Teacher teams found items that would tap into students' thinking and were formatted to allow children to show their work. Here's a third-grade example: Eight children have been invited to a cookie party. Mrs. Johnson has 32 cookies for the children to share equally. How many cookies will each child get? (a) Draw a picture to represent the problem; (b) Write a number sentence that goes with your picture; (c) Explain why your picture goes with the number sentence.

• *Unpacking the assessment* – Grade-level teams met five times a year to look at each assessment item and ask: What does it ask students to do? What can we learn about students' conceptual understanding, strategies, ability to organize space efficiently, understanding, ability to communicate their understanding in pictures and words, and use of mathematical language.

• *Looking at one student's work together* – The teacher team randomly chose one student response, projected it with a document camera, and thought aloud about evidence of

what the student understood, nearly understood, and misunderstood.

• *Analyzing student work* – Teachers then dove into examining their own students' responses and created a one-page Mastery-at-a-Glance checklist of their class's current mathematical reasoning. As they analyzed their students' work, teachers came across responses that raised crucial questions about students' reasoning, and the whole team looked at these papers on the document camera to share ideas. "These difficult cases added depth to teacher content knowledge and fine-tuned our lens for the nuances in student work," say Munson and Morant.

• *Identifying classroom trends* – Teachers then scanned vertically on their own checklists asking:

- What have nearly all students mastered?
- What are some students struggling with, and who are they?
- What are most students struggling with?

Teachers collected these findings on a template. "Taking the time to identify the classroom trends first made this collaborative work on instruction relevant, urgent, and authentic for teachers," say Munson and Morant.

• *Naming instructional implications* – As teachers debriefed their analyses, several common trends emerged and the team brainstormed pedagogical moves and mathematical experiences that would help students bridge the gaps. These were the key questions:

- To grow this skill, what do students need from us?
- If we want students to do math in this way, what does that mean for instruction?
- Where must we meet these students on the concrete-pictorial-abstract continuum?

"Identifying the instructional moves our students needed was the greatest area of growth for our teachers," say Munson and Morant. "One of our key realizations was that when teachers taught the content the first time, they were giving students their best instruction; so, when students needed something more or different for proficiency, teachers were left with few tools to rely on. We quickly recognized that our task as professional developers is to grow teacher content knowledge and improve their toolkits for constructivist pedagogies to fill that gap in capacity." Working with a number of teacher teams, they identified several strategies:

- *Think aloud and model*. Students need to see how to think through tasks and express reasoning, and teacher modeling helps.
- *Build student math talk*. Teachers need to show students authentic, consistent structures for math talk.
- *Develop math writing and representation*. Students need help getting their oral understanding into writing.
- *Build conceptual content knowledge*. Students need lots of help moving along the concrete-pictorial-abstract continuum.

"A Vehicle for Instructional Improvement" by Jen Munson and Tamyka Morant in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, October 2011 (Vol. 18, #3, p. 170-181), http://www.nctm.org; Munson can be reached at munsonjbb@yahoo.com, Morant at tamyka@umb.edu.

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4. A Comprehensive Wrap-Around Program for High-Risk Youth

In this *Kappan* article, John Scully and Glen Holsclaw of the California-based Making Waves Foundation argue that the carefully targeted expenditure of $21,000 a year (above and beyond regular instruction) per at-risk grade 5-12 student is a cost-effective way of closing the achievement gap. Here's how their organization spends the money (they are running their own charter school) to bring about a 99 percent high-school graduation rate, with 75 percent of students who have reached adulthood finishing four-year colleges:

• *Extra academic support* – This includes intensive tutoring and small-group academic advising every school day, a mandatory Saturday Academy, a Summer Academy for grades 5-8, and two 3-week summer workshops for students in grades 9-12.

• *Counseling for college and in college* – Starting in middle school, this includes guidance in getting ready for college work, choosing the right college, filling out applications, getting scholarships, choosing college classes and a major, preparing for graduate school, and getting ready for job interviews.

• *Mental health services* – This includes on-site help with psychiatric illnesses, addiction, gang involvement, anti-social behavior, and domestic violence.

• *Guidance on nutrition* – This includes help dealing with iron deficiency and low protein intake, learning about nutritious meals and snacks low in fat and sugar, and improving family eating habits.

• *Parent involvement and education* – Parents and caregivers are required to attend quarterly community meetings and perform several hours of volunteer work each year. Workshops and courses are available on parenting, nutrition, and other topics.

"The Cost of Changing Lives? Lessons from the Making Waves Foundation" by John Scully and Glenn Holsclaw in *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 2011 (Vol. 93, #3, p. 38), http://www.kappanmagazine.org

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5. Facebook Pages as a Tool in High-School Language Classes

In this article in *The Language Educator*, Joe Terantino and Karen Graf of Kennesaw State University (GA) and California French teacher Nicole Naditz discuss the use of Facebook in high-school language classes. Like many teachers, Naditz had decided not to "friend" students on Facebook, but she was finding that e-mail and her website were not effective ways to communicate with many of her students. So she created a Facebook group page for each of her classes, her French Club, and the French Honor Society, all of which are separate from her personal Friends page (to set up the page, Facebook policy required that she include one "friend", so she enlisted another French teacher). Students requested membership in the French pages (as did some parents), Naditz approved them, and they were off and running.

Naditz has found the Facebook pages are amazingly effective for rapidly getting the word out to all her students about club events, French-language resources, class news, francophone world news, her video tutorials, announcements, and helpful Internet links. Students love using the pages to ask questions about homework or any of the content and to

share resources with their classmates. Spontaneously, almost all communication on the pages is in French.

Terantino and Graf are equally enthusiastic, listing four benefits to using Facebook in language classes. First, it gets students engaged in informal communication with peers in the target language in a familiar format. Second, it allows easy sharing of culturally relevant photos, videos, and music, promoting social and language learning. Third, "the nature of student-to-student and student-to-instructor interactions is more multi-dimensional than in traditional writing assignments," they say. Feedback is more rapid and comes from teachers and peers. Fourth, they continue, "we have never encountered such genuine excitement on behalf of the students when participating in an activity using the target language. We could not have predicted the sheer amount of linguistic production from the students, especially that which emerged outside of the formal writing assignments. The students seemed to enjoy lurking, checking, reading, and writing – completely in Spanish. Even students who were typically reserved and non-participatory in class quickly emerged as highly productive students in this environment."

"Like all Internet resources, Facebook is merely a tool," Naditz concludes. "In and of itself, it will not improve instruction, nor will it ensure that all students more actively engage in the curriculum or automatically become more proficient. It is the way in which teachers employ all the tools at their disposal that will determine whether or not we achieve those goals."

Terantino and Graf add three cautionary notes: It's important to protect students' and instructors' privacy, so access to classroom pages must be restricted. Clear guidelines are needed on appropriate communication on classroom Facebook pages. And finally, they recommend not correcting errors in language usage on Facebook for fear of discouraging the free flow of ideas and content. Students are graded on those aspects of the curriculum in formal papers and tests.

"Using Facebook in the Language Classroom as Part of the Net Generation Curriculum" by Joe Terantino and Karen Graf, and sidebar, "'Friend' or Foe: Facebook in a High-School Language Class" by Nicole Naditz, in *The Language Educator*, November 2011 (Vol. 6, #6, p. 44-47), no e-link available

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6. How Will Technology Affect the Teaching Profession?

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Bryan Hassel and Emily Ayscue Hassel argue that "digital education needs excellent teachers and that a first-rate teaching profession needs digital education." They believe technology will transform teaching in three ways:

• *Extending the reach of the best teachers* – In the digital future, highly effective teachers will make even more of a difference to students, say Hassel and Hassel. Technology will deliver core knowledge and skills to more students. What will differentiate outcomes for schools, states, and nations is how well teachers do the more complex instructional tasks:

- Motivating students to go the extra mile;

- Teaching time management;
- Addressing social and emotional issues that affect learning;
- Diagnosing problems and making changes in real time.

The best teachers have always done this, but in traditional classrooms, they only reach 20-25 percent of students. Technology has the potential to take care of mundane instructional work, freeing top-notch teachers to spend more time on higher-level activities and reach more students. It will also be possible for master teachers to reach students in other classrooms, cities, and countries by using web cameras, videos, and well-designed instructional software.

• *Attracting and retaining the best* – Technology-enhanced teaching should make the profession more rewarding for the best and brightest, say Hassel and Hassel, "wooing unfulfilled engineers and lawyers to a better life."

• *Boosting effectiveness and job options for average teachers* – It's not just the superstars who will benefit from technology, say the authors. "Digital tools will also help average teachers by freeing their time, providing frequent data about their students, serving up tailored professional development, and letting them play focused roles tapping their strengths. They'll be able to join teams that support fully accountable excellent teachers, with the chance to develop and become excellent instructors themselves."

Overall, the digital future will result in fewer, better-qualified lead teachers, supported by new roles such as lab monitors and tutors working shorter hours for lower pay. "The net effect," conclude Hassel and Hassel, "will be a smaller but much stronger and better paid teacher workforce supported by an array of support staff and digital tools, just as we see in most other professions."

"Opinion: Like Peanut Butter and Chocolate, Digital Learning and Excellent Teachers Go Well Together" by Bryan Hassel and Emily Ayscue Hassel in *The Education Gadfly*, Nov. 17, 2011 (Vol. 11, #45), http://www.edexcellence.net/news-commentary/education-gadfly.html

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7. Is She America's Most Experienced Principal?

In this *New York Times* article, Sharon Otterman reports on New York City principal Madeleine Brennan, who started teaching in 1946 (you do the math because her age is a closely guarded secret) and has been a principal for almost 50 years. Brennan's current school is I.S. 201 in Brooklyn, which has 1,500 students, 68 percent of whom qualify for free and reduced-price meals. The school has earned an A in the district's rating system for the last three years, and many students go on to top city high schools. There are five school bands and 250 students auditioned this fall for parts in "Beauty and the Beast."

Brennan still patrols the halls and stops to pick up stray pencils. She is a strict disciplinarian, but allows children to noisily let off steam between classes and in the cafeteria. "They are peculiar ducks, neither fish nor fowl," she says of her middle-school kids. "And you have to love them to really work with them. If you don't love them, you are up a tree."

Asked about the fact that she would make more money retiring with her pension and 401(k), Brennan said, "I don't care. If you like what you are doing, you can do it for a lifetime… I don't think of the future; I don't think of tomorrow. I just go day by day."

"48 Years at Helm, Doing What's Always Worked" by Sharon Otterman in *The New York Times*, Nov. 7, 2011 (p. A17-18), http://nyti.ms/sce5rl

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8. Learning from Downstream Data in Kentucky

In this *Education Week* article, Caralee Adams reports on Kentucky's comprehensive student-achievement data system, which tracks students from pre-school through graduate study.

Many educators had assumed that if students were doing well in high school, they would succeed in college. "By all outward appearances, we were a great school," said Kyle Fannin, a U.S. history and AP American government teacher in Versailles, Kentucky. But downstream data showed students taking remedial math and English courses and losing their state scholarships because they weren't maintaining a 3.0 GPA in college. Returning students reported academic struggles, including that college finals "killed" them.

All this led Fannin's high school to make a number of changes to boost the level of rigor:

- Teachers assigned more reading, including primary sources;
- Students were given longer periods of sustained reading in class;
- Finals counted for a bigger portion of final grades (formerly they counted for only 10 percent);
- AP courses were opened to all students, not just those with high grades;
- Teachers pushed back when students tried to drop AP courses because of mediocre grades;
- Teachers formed professional learning communities to look at real-time student learning data and improve instruction;
- High-school teachers have shared insights with college professors on effective methods of engaging struggling students.

"I care far more about what my students do after they leave me than how they do when they are here," said Fannin.

"It's not cheap and it's not easy, but the benefit is so dramatic," said Charles McGrew, the director of Kentucky's data system. "You can't improve preparation for college if you don't measure how kids are doing across the pipeline… You can't expect people to fix something if they don't know it's broken."

"Data-Sharing in Kentucky Drives College Preparation" by Caralee Adams in *Education Week*, Nov. 16, 2011 (Vol. 31, #12, p. 12-13), available to subscribers at http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/11/16/12data_ep.h31.html

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9. Early Warning Systems for High Schools

This report from Civic Enterprises and the Everyone Graduates Center spells out the key factors in getting early-warning systems to work in high schools:

- Early identification of students who are not on track to graduate;
- Rapid interventions that target students' immediate and longer-term needs;
- Frequent monitoring of interventions;
- Rapid modification of interventions that aren't working;
- Shared learning from outcomes.

"On Track for Success: The Use of Early Warning Indicator and Intervention Systems to Build a Grad Nation" by Mary Bruce, John Bridgeland, Joanna Hornig Fox, and Robert Balfanz, available at http://www.every1graduates.org/images/pdfs/on_track_for_success.pdf, spotted in *PEN Weekly NewsBlast*, Nov. 18, 2011

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10. Short Items:

a. Spanish smartphone apps – Here are some free apps to help students learn Spanish:

• Dictionary – http://www.androidzoom.com/android_applications/boks/and-reference/free-dict-spanish-english_xsrx_download.html

• Phrases – http://www.appbrain.com/app/hola-spanish-handapp/com.movinapp.hola

• Authentic Spanish – http://www.appbrain.com/app/ag-spanish-newspapers-free/com.agargroove.periodicosfree

• Visual Spanish – http://www.appbrain.com/app/learn-spanish-with-pictures/com.zoltanmagyar.llwp.en_es.b

• Verbs – http://androidappsgames.com/android_app_1691.html

• Talking translators – http://www.droidapps.org/talk-to-me-android-translator/

"Smartphone Apps for Smartphones" in *The Language Educator*, November 2011 (Vol. 6, #6, p. 15)

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b. Language resources – This regular feature in *The Language Educator* lists the following Internet resources:

• Center for Open Educational Resources & Language Learning from the University of Texas/Austin: http://www.coerll.utexas.edu

• Mama Lisa's World – International music and culture: http://www.mamalisa.com

• French language and culture – http://www.maisondequartier.com

• Spanish exercises from Ursinus College – http://mld.ursinus.edu/~jarana/Ejercicios

• Chinese language resources from YellowBridge – http://www.yellowbridge.com

"WebWatch" in *The Language Educator*, November 2011 (Vol. 6, #6, p. 60-61)

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c. Museum websites – In this article in *The Language Educator*, Patricia Koning touts the potential of getting students learning languages through works of art. She lists museums that have excellent websites:

- ArtsWork – http://artswork.asu.edu/arts
- J. Paul Getty Museum – http://www.getty.edu/museum
- Kimbell Art Museum – http://www.kimbellart.org
- The Louvre – http://www.louvre.fr
- Metropolitan Museum of Art – http://metmuseum.org/learn/for-eductors
- Museo Nacional del Prado – http://www.museodelprado.es
- Museum of Modern Art – http://www.moma.org
- National Gallery of Art – http://www.nga.gov/education/classroom
- Smithsonian Education – http://smithsonianeducation.org

"Art for Language's Sake" by Patricia Koning in *The Language Educator*, November 2011 (Vol. 6, #6, p. 32-36), no e-link available

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d. Classroom donations site – Teachers can register their classrooms on the Adopt-A-Classroom website to become eligible for support by donors: http://www.adoptaclassroom.org

"WebWatch" in *The Language Educator*, November 2011 (Vol. 6, #6, p. 60)

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall48@gmail.com

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 41 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 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 about 50 issues a year).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are $50 for the school year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and information on paying by check or credit card.

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- A free sample issue

Marshall Memo subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

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- How to change access e-mail or log-in

Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Better Evidence-Based Education
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
JESPAR
Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
New York Times
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
The Atlantic Monthly
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Language Educator
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
The School Administrator
Theory Into Practice