Marshall Memo 1091

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
June 9, 2025

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"Thinking requires work. Reading requires thinking. It's difficult to read and think, so folks shortcut it."

Chris Hakala (quoted in item #1)

"Schools will not develop AI-literate students without AI-literate adults. Whatever our personal opinions about generative AI, I think we have a professional responsibility to understand its capabilities and complexities."

Eric Hudson (see item #2)

"We plan with intention and teach with care, and still, students forget. The problem isn't motivation – it's memory."

Maureen Magnan (see item #4)

"Trying to change others breeds resistance."

Dan Rockwell (see item #6)

"Gratitude is free fuel. Spread it generously."

Dan Rockwell (*ibid*.)

"Education is in a trap. Our field studies daylight behavior – 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. – in great detail. Classes are observed, schools are visited, test scores are released. We can describe five different math curricula and how they differ. But we're missing what happens after dark: the TikTok binge, the fight over putting the phone away, the slow collapse of homework, the late-night texting and gaming that leads to five hours of sleep, the kid whose executive function is so shot he couldn't get his homework done if he were in an empty jail cell."

Mike Goldstein and Sean Geraghty in "What Are Students Doing Between 6 p.m. and Midnight?" in *Education Gadfly*, April 10, 2025

1. The Struggle to Get College Students Reading Books and Long Passages

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Beth McMurtrie reports on her interviews with college professors bemoaning students' underdeveloped reading skills and unwillingness to read and analyze books and long texts. These problems seem to have been worsened by the use of generative AI to summarize readings, which "misleads students by giving them a false sense of having absorbed something," says McMurtrie.

Here are some of the reading struggles professors have been seeing for several years, and don't seem to be improving even as the pandemic recedes in the rear-view mirror:

- Students complaining that reading is confusing, hard, a chore;
- Stumbling over vocabulary words;
- Difficulty reading more than a few pages without being distracted or mentally fatigued;
- Not being able to discern key points in articles;
- Unable to synthesize readings without altering the meaning;
- Spending very little free time reading for exploration or pleasure.

Instructors' "frustration, sadness, and confusion is palpable," says McMurtrie. One professor said she's basically given up and started assigning shorter texts, podcasts, and YouTube explainers, using her lectures to go over the readings and having students take turns presenting their takeaways so she knows that at least some of them are doing the reading.

This is "a crisis of thinking as much as it is about reading," says Chris Hakala, a psychology professor at Springfield College. "Thinking requires work. Reading requires thinking. It's difficult to read and think, so folks shortcut it." Students think chatbot summaries will give them a quick sense of what their instructors are looking for, but they're depriving themselves of deeper understanding.

Troy Spier of Florida A&M University asked students about their reading habits and found they were not into books, doing almost all their reading on phones. "Students have never been taught to engage in slow reading," he says, and basic reading strategies like pre-reading, browsing, and using a library catalogue are not in their repertoires. Class reading that should take four or five hours takes them far less time, while they admit spending about twelve hours a day on phones.

Liz Norell, an instructional support director in Mississippi, surveyed students and found two main complaints:

- Assigned readings are rarely discussed in class.
- The reason for doing the reading is not made clear – recall, analysis, agreement?

These had a familiar ring, which led her to wonder if the current reading problem is actually new. A little retrospection revealed that students have always skimmed some of their readings and skipped others, but now professors are more attuned to the issue. Norell also thinks the pandemic and other troubling events have had a discombobulating effect. "My students are just deeply worried about the world," she says, "as many of us are. And it just doesn't seem like a huge important thing that they get every single scrap of reading done for class."

A few professors told McMurtrie about strategies that are having a positive impact: gradually scaling up the amount of reading (from 20 pages to 30 pages a day in one case), building in class time to review at-home readings, and having students fill out reading guides on the objectives and main ideas of each assigned reading and handing them in an hour or so before class. This scaffolded approach, says Stuart Patterson at North Central College, is an acknowledgement that "the kind of undirected, immersive reading that we'd love to see" seems to be on the wane. Some professors give quizzes and in-class essays based on readings, and when these count for grades, students do the reading.

Other professors are rethinking the readings they assign. Susan Blum of the University of Notre Dame took a fresh look at articles she'd been using for years and found them "boring and stiff… too many words on the page. The author takes too long to get to the point." Blum wonders if we're all changing our reading habits. She's now assigning shorter, more colloquial works with a combination of text, images, videos, and interviews, aiming for academic rigor with journalistic flair.

Asked if she thinks there's no substitute for reading, Blum said, "I no longer buy that argument. I think people can be transported by film and television and music. Yes, there are the kinds of abstract arguments that we get in long texts, which is why I still write them. But I no longer believe reading is uniquely capable of educating."

Patterson (quoted above) has studied the evolution of human communication over the millennia:

- Oral
- Written
- Movies
- Internet's multimedia format.

"I wonder what place reading will have in our educational system in even a few decades," he asks. Reading won't disappear, he believes, "but I think the most interesting questions right now concern the nature of education itself."

"The Reading Struggle Meets AI" by Beth McMurtrie in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 22, 2025; McMurtrie can be reached at beth.mcmurtrie@chronicle.com.

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2. A Guide to Understanding and Using AI

"Schools will not develop AI-literate students without AI-literate adults," says tech expert Eric Hudson in this *Learning on Purpose* article. "Whatever our personal opinions about

generative AI, I think we have a professional responsibility to understand its capabilities and complexities." He believes it's especially important to learn how to talk to students about AI in an open, forward-thinking way.

Hudson starts by recommending five big-picture articles (click the link below for URLs), one of which, by Ezra Klein and Rebecca Winthrop, was summarized in last week's Memo. Hudson then suggests a playlist for each of four key areas, with suggested activities and online resources for each:

• *Functional literacy: How does GenAI work?* "Prompting remains the most important skill a user can have," says Hudson. He suggests reading *AI for Education's* prompt library, noting the key elements of an effective prompt, and trying out detailed, context-specific prompts with several chatbots, fine-tuning as you go. An important insight: chatbots behave differently depending on how they're prompted. Hudson also suggests going beyond text and exploring AI's ability to generate photos, video, music, diagrams, infographics, and more, and asking for interpretation and analysis.

• *Ethical literacy: How do we navigate the moral issues?* Talk with colleagues, students, family members, and friends about AI ethics, Hudson advises, perhaps using the scenarios in Stanford's Ethical Engine Cards. Key questions: what can you learn from other people's perspectives and from the bias embedded in each AI tool?

• *Rhetorical literacy: How do we use natural and AI-generated language to achieve our goals?* Engage in reflective play, Hudson advises. Ask a chatbot to create something you would normally do yourself – a letter, report, lesson plan, meeting agenda – and give successive prompts to improve the product. You can also pit chatbots against each other, giving several the same prompt and comparing what they produce. Finally, Hudson suggests having students and teachers test how good GenAI is at a variety of coursework, addressing the issue of cheating versus productive use.

• *Pedagogical literacy: How do we use AI to enhance teaching and learning?* Generate lesson plans, rubrics, or feedback in your area of expertise and evaluate what different chatbots produce. How valuable is the initial product, and how much additional prompting is needed to bring the products up to your standards? Another approach is to feed your own teaching materials into several chatbots and ask each to evaluate them against evidence-based standards of teaching and learning. And Hudson suggests pretending to be a student and using chatbots in a way you imagine your students have, especially in working with your content material. How do you assess AI's output, and which factors might students consider in deciding whether to use AI?

"Building Our AI Capacity: A Playlist for Educators" by Eric Hudson in *Learning on Purpose*, May 30, 2025

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3. Scoring Five Chatbots' Ability to Summarize and Analyze Texts

In this *Washington Post* article, Geoffrey Fowler reports on how well ChatGPT-4o, Claude 3.7 Sonnet, Copilot for Microsoft 365, Meta AI (Llama 4), and Gemini 2.0 Flash

summarized and analyzed different types of text, as judged by panels of experts. Overall, Claude and ChatGPT were head and shoulders above the others, especially on analysis. Claude was the only one that never "hallucinated" (made stuff up). But none of the chatbots got an A or even a B+ across the board. The details:

• **Literature** – The text: *The Jackal's Mistress*, a Civil War novel by Chris Bohjalian.
Overall scores (out of 10): ChatGPT 7.8, Claude 7.3, Meta AI 4.3, Copilot 3.5, Gemini 2.3

Summarizing the novel, only Claude got all the facts right, and ChatGPT's précis was passable but little more than a dust-jacket blurb, describing only three of the novel's five main characters. Summaries by the other chatbots were much less impressive, some failing to mention slavery and the Civil War, and Gemini's was full of inaccuracies. On the analytical questions, Bohjalian found the quality of answers from ChatGPT and Claude very impressive, expressing "precisely what I was trying to convey."

• **Law** – The texts: a rental and a contractor agreement; one of the judges was Sterling Miller, a longtime corporate lawyer.
Overall scores: Claude 6.9, Gemini 6.1, Copilot 5.4, ChatGPT 5.3, Meta AI 2.6

Claude did best, including answering how the rental agreement might be changed. Meta AI and ChatGPT tried to reduce complex parts of the contracts to one-line summaries, which "is basically useless," said Miller. Worse, he continued, the chatbots didn't seem to appreciate significant nuances: Meta AI skipped several sections and missed that a landlord could enter the property at any time. ChatGPT forgot to mention a clause in the contractor agreement on who owned inventions.

• **Health science** – The texts: scholarly papers on Parkinson's disease and long Covid co-authored by Eric Topol, one of the judges.
Overall scores: Claude 7.7, ChatGPT 7.2, Copilot 7, Gemini 6.5, Meta AI 6

In general, the chatbots were more accurate in this type of text, perhaps because scientific papers follow a similar format and AI has access to the same scientific databases. However, there were inconsistencies: Claude scored a perfect 10 for its summary of one paper but a 5 on an analytical question. The lowest score (4) went to Gemini's summary of the Parkinson's study, which left out key descriptions and why the subject mattered.

• **Politics** – The text: speeches by President Trump; one of the judges: Cat Zakrzewski, a *Washington Post* White House reporter.
Overall scores: ChatGPT 7.2, Claude 6.2, Meta AI 5.2, Gemini 5, Copilot 3.7

ChatGPT did the best job of analyzing and fact-checking the speeches, but scored well on only half of the analysis questions. Copilot did worst, making up a statistic about the number of jobs returned to Michigan, which had not been specified in the speech. All the chatbots struggled to convey the tone of the speeches.

Fowler sums up his takeaways from the study: although Claude and ChatGPT were very impressive at analyzing a literary text (the author of the novel said he was gobsmacked), none of the chatbots' average scores reached 8 on a 10-point scale, and even the highest-scoring bots had major inconsistencies.

"Beyond hallucinations," says Fowler, "a number of limitations echoed across the tests. AI summaries frequently left out important information and overemphasized the positive (while ignoring the negative)." Bohjalian, the author, said you could "really see the robot hiding behind the human mask," pretending to be an expert in something it didn't fully understand. A chatbot's proficiency in one field didn't necessarily translate to another. For example, ChatGPT did well in literature and politics but poorly in law.

The bottom line: proceed with caution and skepticism, run a text through at least two chatbots and compare the results. "For something that's actually important to your life," concludes Fowler, "it's definitely worth taking the time to read it yourself."

"5 AI Bots Took Our Tough Reading Test. One Was Smartest – and It Wasn't ChatGPT" by Geoffrey Fowler in *The Washington Post*, June 4, 2025; Fowler can be reached at geoffrey.fowler@washpost.com.

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4. Making Retrieval Practice a Regular Classroom Routine

"We plan with intention and teach with care, and still, students forget," says veteran Massachusetts educator Maureen Magnan in *Edutopia*. "The problem isn't motivation – it's memory." Children (and adults) forget more than half of new learning within an hour, nearly two-thirds within 24 hours. But forgetting is not a design flaw, says Magnan; "It protects our brains from overload." The challenge for teachers is how to get students to retain the stuff that matters.

In recent decades, cognitive scientists have identified four essential processes that support lasting learning:

- Attention – what we focus on and notice;
- Encoding – how we process and make sense of it;
- Storage – how we keep that information in our brains;
- Retrieval – how we access and use stored information when it's needed.

Of these, retrieval – bringing information back to mind – plays the most important part in long-term retention. "When students engage in active recall," says Magnan, "they strengthen neural pathways, making knowledge more durable, flexible, and accessible." Without piling more on their plates, teachers can put this insight to work to greatly improve students' long-term retention. Magnan suggests seven low-key ways to use retrieval in classrooms.

- Brain dump – After 10-20 minutes of instruction, students write down everything they remember and then check to see how complete their recall is.
- Read, pause, retrieve – After reading a short passage, students pause and write as much as they remember without looking, then look back at the passage and fill in gaps.
- No-quiz quick-writes – At intervals during a lesson, students "stop and jot" in response to a prompt or personal connection. This also strengthens metacognitive reflection.
- Mini-quizzes – These low-stakes, no-grades tests boost memory, improve confidence, and strengthen connections. Students can discuss, pair/share, or self-check.

- Stoplight reading – Students read a text and assess their comprehension by marking in red what they don't understand, yellow what they can figure out based on context, and green what they know well. Then they use retrieval for the red sections.
- Breathe, retrieve, reflect – The teacher announces a word or concept and students hold up a number: 1=Nailed it, 2=I've got it, 3=I forgot. Students then share their level with a partner and retrieve together. This normalizes forgetting, with immediate follow-up.
- Embed retrieval into routines – Start the day with a Do Now asking what students learned the day before, or pause mid-lesson and ask for retrieval from a previous unit or how today's content connects with previous learning – using turn and talk, stop and jot, sticky notes and graffiti walls, drawing, writing, and more.

"To help students learn more," Magnan concludes, "we don't need to teach more; we need to pause, retrieve, reflect, and connect. By giving students frequent, low-stakes opportunities to forget and remember, we're not just preparing them for a test, we're equipping them to build lasting knowledge, confidence, and independence."

[Here are quotes on retrieval practice from four leading cognitive scientists:

Retrieving a fact is not like opening a computer file. It alters what we remember and changes how we subsequently organize that knowledge in our brain.

Henry Roediger III, Washington University, St. Louis

Active recall, facilitated through retrieval practice, not only improves memory but also helps learners identify and address gaps in their understanding.

Kripa Sundar, Ed Tech Recharge

The more we internally access or recall a memory, the deeper, more durable, and more accessible that memory becomes in the future.

Jared Cooney Horvath, University of Melbourne

It's a no-stakes learning opportunity that is flexible and quick, with a huge impact on long-term student achievement.

Pooja Agarwal, Berklee College of Music]

"7 Retrieval Activities That Help Learning Stick" by Maureen Magnan in *Edutopia*, June 2, 2025

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5. Coaching and Supporting Principals Caught in the "Urgency Cycle"

In this *Read by Example* article, Matt Renwick draws on his 16 years as a principal to describe a dynamic that undermines principals' ability to be instructional leaders:

- Inundated by urgent tasks like student discipline referrals and crises;
- The following day spent catching up on paperwork;
- Not visiting classrooms and visible in common areas;
- This becomes a pattern, with less accountability and support for teachers;
- The result is lack of consistency and coherence across classrooms;

- Without that, behavior problems and other time-intensive interruptions increase.

"This reality can reset a leader's sense of what is normal," says Renwick. "So they live in this state of urgency instead of working on what's important because at least they feel they are helping teachers in some way, i.e., keeping challenging behaviors out of the classroom."

Leaders can become addicted to the stress, Renwick believes, and that leads to a unique kind of trauma: "not feeling effective in solving the ongoing challenges in their school." For those who supervise or coach school leaders succumbing to H.S.P.S. (hyperactive superficial principal syndrome), Renwick has this strategic advice:

• *Build trust through frequent visits*. Regular, positive interactions with principals helps to rewire their brains to feel safe about receiving feedback.

• *Listen to learn*. It's important to hear what's on the principal's mind, says Renwick, which is often student discipline problems. Coaches and supervisors need to leave their agenda at the door and ask lots of questions, he says. "Supporting leaders to address their immediate challenges can help them feel listened to while getting some quick wins."

• *Notice and name emotions*. "Eventually," says Renwick, "leaders will share how they are feeling about their situation," with words or body language. The coach needs to tune in and acknowledge that emotion, saying, for example, "It can be demoralizing to come in every day and see the same students struggling to learn." This can be an important starting point.

• *Investigate the systems, not the people*. A principal's frustrations happen one person or group at a time, but the coach's job is to shift the leader's attention away from personalities to patterns and systemic factors that underlie negative outcomes. Data about student behavior might point to one grade level or part of the building and suggest targeted interventions. It's not about fixing one person or a bunch of people, says Renwick. "We can see the learning conditions and undeveloped skills as areas for attention."

"Breaking the Urgency Cycle: How to Coach Leaders Back to Instructional Focus" by Matt Renwick in *Read by Example*, April 26, 2025; Renwick can be reached at renwickme@gmail.com.

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6. How to Flip Unhelpful Beliefs and Lead More Effectively

In this *Leadership Freak* article, Dan Rockwell lists four problematic beliefs and suggests a better way to address the underlying issue with each:

• *I can change people*. "Trying to change others breeds resistance," says Rockwell. Better to orchestrate conditions where people choose to change themselves. Help colleagues clarify their goals, identify useful behaviors, and engage in activities and projects that allow them to flourish.

• *Working harder fixes things*. This mindset prioritizes what's urgent, often leaving what's important unaddressed. Rockwell's advice for leaders: ask colleagues what delivers long-term benefit and how they can deal with a concern without you. Don't do their jobs for them, and don't ask them to waste their time on busywork.

• *Gratitude is for special occasions*. "Withholding appreciation drains morale," he says. "Gratitude is free fuel. Spread it generously." An especially good word is *admire*, as in, "One thing I admire about you is…"

• *It's not that bad*. "Minimizing problems makes them worse," says Rockwell. "Name one issue people tiptoe around and start a healthy conversation. Shine light on tough issues *with optimism*."

"4 Wrong Beliefs That Feel Right" by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, June 5, 2025; Rockwell can be reached at dan@leadershipfreak.com.

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7. A Teacher Decides When It's Okay to Be Just Average

In this online article, high-school teacher/author Dave Stuart Jr. says he's realized that a lot of the stress and overload of teaching can be mitigated if we give ourselves permission to be "good enough" at a few activities that aren't central to the work. "It sounds irresponsible," says Stuart, "unless you contemplate the vastly underappreciated reality that human beings are finite creatures and that teaching as a job today contains thousands of potential directions in which to spin one's wheels." Here are the two areas in which Stuart has decided he can be just so-so:

• *Replicating lessons for absent students* – When students return from an absence and ask him what they missed, he has them look at the lesson slides on Canvas and then:

- Get missed notes from a classmate.
- Grab missed handouts (they're kept in a regular place in the classroom).
- Complete the warm-up so as not to miss out on that writing practice.

What Stuart doesn't do for absent students is:

- Record his lessons;
- Make sure everything is explained in detail and digitally available;
- Micromange them as they complete their missed work.

Would doing those three things make him a better teacher? "Perhaps," says Stuart. "Are they valuable enough to justify the extra hours (at home) I'd need to take to make them possible? No, they are not."

• *Having a "perfect" gradebook* – "Now remember," Stuart is quick to add, "these two items aren't things I'm terrible at; they are things I'm just far from perfect at." The goal for his gradebook, he says, is for students' final grades to reflect their actual degree of mastery of the course material, with 40 percent for classwork and 60 percent for assessments (per department policy).

For classwork, he has 1-3 assignments a week with 10 possible points for each – perhaps participation in a pop-up debate, completing warm-ups, a writing assignment, a low-stakes quiz. With these, the emphasis is on learning, not grades.

For assessments, there is a one- or two-part test per unit, developed with his department colleagues. Stuart tries to enter grades within a week, but his philosophy is that late grading isn't nearly as big a problem as late feedback, and the latter is what he concentrates on.

His bottom line: “Be good at the important, settle for average with the rest.”

“Two (of Many) Things I’m (Intentionally) Not Good At” by Dave Stuart Jr., May 8, 2025; Stuart can be reached at dave@davestuartjr.com.

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8. Recommended Children’s Books on Diseases and Vaccines

In *School Library Journal,* Deborah Hopkinson recommends these books about infectious diseases and vaccinations as resources for public health education:

- *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson, grade 4-9
- *Viral: The Fight Against AIDS in America* by Ann Bausum, grade 7 and up
- *Year of Wonders* by Geraldine Brooks, grade 9 and up
- *Fever Year: The Killer Flu of 1918* by Don Brown, grade 6-8
- *Never Give Up: Dr. Katie Karikó and the Race for the Future of Vaccines* by Debbie Dadey, illustrated by Juliana Oakley Millbrook, K-4
- *Everything Is Tuberculosis: The History and Persistence of Our Deadliest Infection* by John Green, grade 9 and up
- *Scientists Are Saving the World!* by Saskia Gwinn, illustrated by Ana Albero, K-4
- *Evidence! How Dr. John Snow Solved the Mystery of Cholera* by Deborah Hopkinson, illustrated by Nik Henderson, grade 1-5
- *Kati’s Tiny Messengers: Dr. Katalin Karikó and the Battle Against Covid-19* by Megan Hoyt, illustrated by Vivien Mildenberger, K-4
- *Breaking Through: My Life in Science* by Katalin Karikó, grade 7 and up
- *Germy Science: The Sick Truth About Getting Sick (and Staying Healthy)* by Edward Kay, illustrated by Mike Shiell, grade 3-7
- *A Vaccine Is Like a Memory* by Rajani Larocca, illustrated by Kathleen Marcotte, K-6 and up
- *The Polio Pioneer: Dr. Jonas Salk and the Polio Vaccine* by Linda Elovitz Marshall, illustrated by Lisa Anchin, PreK-4
- *History Smashers: Plagues and Pandemics* by Kate Messner, illustrated by Falynn Koch, grade 3-7
- *Dr. Fauci: How a Boy from Brooklyn Became America’s Doctor* by Kate Messner, illustrated by Alexandra Bye, grade 1-4
- *Invincible Microbe: Tuberculosis and the Never-Ending Search for a Cure* by Jim Murphy and Alison Blank, grade 4-8
- *The Secret Life of Viruses: Incredible Science Facts About Germs, Vaccines, and What You Can Do to Stay Healthy* by Mariona Tolosa Sisteré and the Ellas Educan Collective, PreK-4

“Going Viral” by Deborah Hopkinson in *School Library Journal*, June 2025 (Vol. 71, #6, pp. 38-41)

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If you have feedback or suggestions, please e-mail kim.marshall48@gmail.com

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 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 early Tuesday (there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTMI version. Artificial intelligence is not used.

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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
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Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
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Language Arts
Language Magazine
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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