Marshall Memo 1075

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
February 17, 2025

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Quotes of the Week

"Getting in front of a classroom full of students and seeing that 'Aha!' moment is a thrill like none other."

> A college teacher, quoted in "What Keeps Stressed-Out Faculty Members Going? Their Students" by Beth McMurtrie in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 14, 2025 (Vol. 71, #12, pp. 26-31)

"The number of beginning teachers entering classrooms has reached its highest point in decades."

> Andrew Kwok and Kathy Ogden Macfarlane (see item #4)

"Every elementary school is nearly a microcosm of the larger society as far as cognitive inequality is concerned."

> Christopher Jencks (see item #1)

"We care more about the grade than we do about learning. And that kind of sucks."

> A California high-school student (see item #2)

"Recruiting teachers of color and preparing all teachers to be fluent in the cultural repertoires of marginalized students certainly can help students connect to school. But it is not enough. High expectations can encourage students to take their academic futures seriously. But they are not enough."

> Suneal Kolluri (ibid.)

"Growing old is mandatory, but growing up is optional."

> Walt Disney

"When a thing is funny, search it carefully for a hidden truth."

> George Bernard Shaw

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1. A Tribute to Christopher Jencks

Harvard sociologist Christopher Jencks died on February 8th at 88. His widely read 1972 book, *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (written with seven colleagues) was ahead of its time in these areas:

- Describing the impact of individual teachers on students' life trajectories;
- Asserting that teachers have an especially big impact on vulnerable students;
- Emphasizing the importance of teaching non-cognitive skills;
- Advocating for less emphasis on test scores and student-to-student competition;
- Rebutting racist theories about I.Q. and documenting the almost-even distribution of talent and intelligence among schools;
- Arguing for heterogeneous grouping of students to maximize peer-to-peer learning;
- Urging educators to think globally and act locally, focusing on reforms in their own schools.

Here are a few Jencks quotes:

Every elementary school is nearly a microcosm of the larger society as far as cognitive inequality is concerned.

Most jobs require a wide variety of skills. Standardized tests measure only a very limited number of these skills.

Tests measure the student's ability to guess what the examiner wants. Some of the items are ambiguous. This does not appear to be deliberate. Nonetheless, the effect is that a student will do well if he is good at figuring out what the tester had in mind. The student who does not think like a teacher/tester will do poorly, as will the student who panics when confronted with ambiguity and refuses to guess.

A successful campaign for reducing economic inequality probably requires two things. First, those with low incomes must cease to accept their condition as inevitable and just. Instead of assuming, like unsuccessful gamblers, that their numbers will eventually come up or that their children's numbers will, they must demand changes in the rules of the game. Second, some of those with high incomes, and especially the children of those with high incomes, must begin to feel ashamed of economic inequality. If these things were to happen, significant institutional changes in the machinery of income distribution would become politically feasible.

"Christopher Jencks, a Shaper of Views on Economic Inequality, Dies at 88" by Clay Risen in *The New York Times*, February 12, 2025; see also Kim Marshall's January 1974 article in *Learning Magazine*, "Who's Afraid of Christopher Jencks?"

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2. Why Were Students Cheating in a Culturally Affirming High School?

In this *American Journal of Education* article, Suneal Kolluri (University of California/ Riverside) reports on his study of an urban high school in California. In over 200 hours of observations and more than 50 interviews, Kolluri found that teachers "were adept at building deep, culturally responsive connections with their students," almost all of whom were African American and Latin. Teachers held students to high academic standards, stressing the need to master the skills they needed to succeed in mainstream America, while forging bonds to their community and history.

Students appreciated their caring and culturally competent teachers, but Kolluri found that academic cheating was rampant in the school. "In this environment of loving care," he says, "one might be surprised that students engaged so trivially in their schoolwork."

Kolluri believes that a vital ingredient was missing in teachers' caring relationships and high academic expectations for their marginalized students: the critical consciousness students needed to handle the pressure to get high test scores "in an ideology of meritocracy." Students were striving for individual achievement without a broader sense of how America's social and racial inequalities came about. Lacking this consciousness, he says, students were "simply 'doing school,' mechanically completing assignments while resisting deeper learning."

Kolluri noted another worrisome phenomenon: low enrollment in AP classes. "In response to culturally affirming care without critical consciousness," he says, "students were polite and relationally warm but academically disengaged. They carefully crafted the illusion of diligence to satisfy beloved teachers and earn passing grades… The vast majority of students I interviewed were profoundly appreciative of their relationships with teachers but were woefully uninspired by the work they assigned." One student said, "We care more about the grade than we do about learning. And that kind of sucks."

The work was "entirely irrelevant to their lives," says Kolluri, "to be endured, not enjoyed… In this educational context of interpersonal connection and curricular disconnect, students were simultaneously at home and at sea. They were comfortable, but they were uninspired. Without an opportunity to interrogate the day-to-day realities within their marginalized communities, they completed work quickly and without thinking."

Cheating was the way students reconciled respect for teachers, desire to get good grades, and low engagement with the curriculum. "Ever since we were small," said one student, "we've had it embedded in our brain that we had to go to college" – and cheating would help them get there. Kolluri observed one student preparing for a history test by writing facts about the Articles of Confederation on his palm and, when he ran out of space, on his forearm. "By the start of the test," says Kolluri, "the young man had converted much of a limb

into a detailed reference guide." During the test, a fellow student had him whisper information. "She always asks me for answers," he said.

Kolluri says that in the year he spent in the school, he never once saw a student reprimanded for cheating, nor was the way students completed their work a topic of conversation among teachers. "In meritocratic neoliberalism," he says, "the work itself had no inherent purpose. Its sole purpose was to be done. When students did it, grades were entered, and success was assumed."

The heart of the matter, Kolluri believes, is that teachers ignored social issues in the classroom. They taught conventional academic standards, supplemented by personal caring and cultural enrichment, but with "a firm belief that social systems in the United States were fair." Teachers "served up meritocratic platitudes about work completion as the key ingredient of future success." What was missing, he believes, was teaching about "the struggle, resistance, and collective uplift in students' home communities… In the absence of deliberate interrogations of social inequality, students struggled to find a purpose for their work beyond individual advancement."

Kolluri concludes by arguing that "half-loaf measures" will not do. "Recruiting teachers of color and preparing all teachers to be fluent in the cultural repertoires of marginalized students certainly can help students connect to school," he says. "But it is not enough. High expectations can encourage students to take their academic futures seriously. But they are not enough. Without cultivating a sense of critical social urgency – a pedagogy that draws on the day-to-day challenges of marginalized urban contexts – students may politely go through the motions of academic engagement. In so doing, they will not engage in ways that are likely to be transformative for themselves and their communities, a significant missed opportunity."

"Love and Meritocracy: Culturally Affirming Care and Cheating in an Urban High School" by Suneal Kolluri in *American Journal of Education*, February 2025 (Vol. 131, #2, pp. 271-297); Kolluri can be reached at suneal.kolluri@ucr.edu.

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3. How Accurately Does a Facebook Page Portray Local Schools?

In this article in *American Journal of Education*, Ashley Carey (Sacred Heart University) says a variety of sources influence citizens' opinions about local public schools, even when they've never set foot in them:

- Word of mouth;
- News media;
- State accountability reports;
- Websites like Greatschools.org;
- Online social networks like Facebook.

Americans have historically had high levels of confidence in their local public schools (even while holding less-favorable views of schools across the nation). However, confidence in local

schools has declined in recent years, with partisan politics taking hold in local school board elections and national talking points (e.g., critical race theory, pronouns, the need to ban certain children's books) shaping opinions.

Carey studied a Facebook page in a six-school district in New England. Nearly half of the adults in this community were members of the Facebook group. Carey analyzed the quality of the page's information in three areas:

- Representation – What did people post about their schools? Did posts represent a diversity of opinion? Which types of posts elicited high and low levels of engagement?
- Structural – Who posted about the schools on Facebook? What percent of people actively posted? How many were repeat posters?
- Interactional – How did the group dialogue in the Facebook comments section function?

Here's what Carey found:

• *Critical posts dominated*. "Posts that offered negative reflections of school quality far outweighed those that offered positive reflections," says Carey – 40.6% were negative, 4.3% positive, 54.3% neutral.

• *Emotional, negative posts sparked a lot of responses*. For example, one parent's post about her daughter being bullied ("For God sake she's only six!... Oh and if you're the parent of a mean kid, SHAME ON YOU!!!! Sick of seeing her come home every day in tears!") got more than 100 comments. Neutral posts – for example, a question on when school started – got low engagement – usually a quick response to the question.

• *A tiny percent of the community posted on the page*. Of the 14,700 members of the Facebook group, there were 138 posts created by 109 unique users – less than 1 percent.

• *High-engagement posts were overwhelmingly negative*. In the comments section of the Facebook page, says Carey, there was "an onslaught of comments that reinforced the negative image of the schools," often one or two people making repeat comments.

• *Dissenters were "policed."* When people presented different perspectives, the high-engagement posters vigorously pushed back, discouraging further dialogue.

• *There was a negative pile-on in the comments*. High-engagement comments critical of the schools "often garnered a multitude of comments offering additional negative feedback," says Carey. "The comments that ensued painted a portrait of a district that sweeps bullying and assault under the rug, fails to meet the needs of special education students, and bungles basic transportation infrastructure like school drop-off… Juxtaposed with the onslaught of negative comments about [the district] were shining reviews of private schools, Catholic schools, charter schools, and schools in neighboring districts."

• *Repeat commenters dominated the conversation*. In one series of interactions, one particularly active parent, Comment Cathy, made 46 of the 243 comments. This parent was on a campaign, alleging (without evidence) that the district is "creating violent and unnecessary mental, emotional, and physical abuse to our children," that special education children are "being attacked, retaliated, or judged" by the district. Comment Cathy and two other parents engaged in what Carey calls "comment-stacking behavior to seemingly drive up comment

counts." The real level of bullying in the district was actually low, as revealed by a report at a school board meeting.

• *Facebook's algorithm feeds this dynamic*. It "prioritizes virality," says Carey. "Posts that garner high numbers of comments are pushed to the top of users' notifications, which inevitably leads to greater visibility and more comments. Frequent fliers in the comment section, like Comment Cathy, easily drove up the comment count on posts, causing the algorithm to prioritize those posts."

• *Facebook empowers a few people to convey a highly distorted picture of the schools*. "Although Comment Cathy, alone, might come off as a disgruntled parent on a mission to discredit the schools," says Carey, "her ability to engage with other parents in the comment section, which ultimately attracts more commenters to the post via the algorithm, creates an air of legitimacy to her claims… Facebook presents an accessible tool for special interest actors who wish to destabilize the institution of public education."

The district's leaders tried to compete with this "hot" social media portrayal of schools, but the channels they used, says Carey, were "cold" and much less effective:

- School board meetings;
- State data;
- Asking parents to use regular channels to report bullying;
- Using formal, legalese language to communicate their message.

"The public perceives these types of 'cold' knowledge as formal and inauthentic," says Carey. "In the current political climate and amid growing distrust of schools, this careful and 'cold' approach to social media has struggled to compete with emotional firsthand accounts."

What are embattled districts like this one to do? Carey doesn't think hiring third-party contractors to use social media for PR about positive developments in the schools is a good strategy. Better for school administrators to use social media as a natural extension of their in-person interactions, telling parents and the community about positive day-to-day events in schools by pushing their messages to smartphones and tablets.

The trick, says Carey, is doing this "without burdening parents with additional apps and log-ins." A school might use texts to highlight big and small wins – recognizing a group of eighth graders who placed at the state's science fair or an orchestra teacher for excellence in music education. "These little nuggets of positive information," says Carey, "remind families of all the good happening in the schools and can counteract some of the negative information on social media."

"'That Middle School Is Trash!' Public Knowledge About Local Schools on Social Media" by Ashley Carey in *American Journal of Education*, February 2025 (Vol. 131, #2, pp. 189-209); Carey can be reached at careya11@sacredheart.edu.

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4. Effective Induction for Beginning Teachers

"The number of beginning teachers entering classrooms has reached its highest point in decades," say Andrew Kwok and Kathy Ogden Macfarlane (Texas A&M University) in this Annenberg/Brown University EdResearch for Action Brief. "Beginning teachers, while often passionate and eager to make a difference, are less effective than their more experienced colleagues, on average. This gap stems from the steep learning curve that new educators face as they transition from preparation programs to the realities of the classroom."

Effective induction is essential to bridging this gap, and Kwok and Macfarlane report on their study of key factors in the best programs for novice teachers. They cite research evidence that the right kind of support improves new teacher retention (20-40 percent leave within the first five years, 11 percent after just one year), the quality of instruction, and student achievement. Here are the components that have the best evidence of positive impact:

• *Coaching* – The most successful induction programs provide high-quality coaching throughout the first year. Some important components:

- Carefully chosen coaches, ideally in the same content area and grade as coachees;
- Training, ongoing support, and accountability for coaches;
- Frequent interactions with new teachers – at least 90 minutes weekly or biweekly;
- Specific help for new teachers on the daily responsibilities of teaching;
- Modeling of effective classroom practices in real or simulated classroom settings;
- Weekly or bi-weekly classroom visits and timely, structured, actionable feedback;
- Guiding new teachers in evaluating student work and assessment data.

Ideally coaches are full-time, or have reduced teaching loads and stipends, so they can devote significant time to beginning teachers.

• *Targeted professional development* – High-quality training directly linked to what beginning teachers are experiencing day to day: classroom management, technology, lesson planning, curriculum development, and pedagogy.

• *Peer collaboration* – Regularly scheduled meetings in common planning times with same-grade or same-subject colleagues (or, for lonely singletons, access to an external network of teachers) to share effective strategies, discuss classroom challenges, and analyze student work and assessments. Being observed and getting feedback from colleagues is also helpful.

• *Administrative support* – This includes establishing a positive professional working environment, setting goals, regular communication, classroom visits, appreciation and specific guidance for improvement, supporting new teachers with student misbehavior and parent interactions, and supervising the work of instructional coaches.

• *Workload adjustments* – Customizing new teachers' class size, student load, schedules, preps, and paraprofessional support can make all the difference in supporting their learning curve. Arranging for them to observe colleagues' classrooms is also helpful.

Kwok and Macfarlane conclude with a list of practices that are *not* helpful for beginning teachers:

- Voluntary induction programs that don't deliver equitable support to all new teachers;

- Sporadic and superficial coaching that fails to build skills and confidence;
- Rigid, overly prescriptive requirements, especially those that are out of synch with new teachers' previous training;
- Top-down approaches in which beginners passively receive knowledge and procedures and don't build independent problem-solving skills and a sense of efficacy.

"Strengthening Early-Career Teachers: Effective Components of Teacher Induction Programs" by Andrew Kwok and Kathy Ogden Macfarlane, Annenberg/Brown University EdResearch for Action Brief #32, February 2025; Kwok can be reached at akwok@tamu.edu.

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5. Better Ways to Recognize Excellence

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Kevin McClure (University of North Carolina/Wilmington) says he's come to believe that "our entire approach to recognizing and appreciating employees in higher education is broken." Do his concerns apply to K-12 schools?

• *Few awards go to a small number of recipients* – Getting recognized, says McClure, is a competitive and bureaucratic process that sometimes depends on personal connections and isn't always linked to the current mission of the institution. In addition, awards are given to individuals when sometimes it's a team that did the most important work.

• *People are hungry for recognition and don't think they're getting enough*. Surveys show that less than a quarter of respondents believe they are receiving the right amount of recognition, only a third agree that the recognition they receive is authentic, and three-quarters question the fairness of awards that are conferred. Conversely, people who feel their work is genuinely appreciated say they are more professionally engaged, are "thriving" in life, and are less likely to be looking for another job.

• *People want meaningful appreciation*. It doesn't have to come from the institution's leaders, says McClure. When he asked his colleagues, many said they weren't interested in "gold stars or engraved paperweights." Decent pay, meaningful professional development, and free parking were more important – but also a sincere, personal note of thanks from a leader. And, says McClure, "Some also wanted – more than anything – for supervisors to listen to their concerns and check in on their well-being as people, not just producers."

What would a better institutional process for recognition look like? McClure has the following suggestions:

• *More and broader recognition* – For example, the University of Louisville instituted new awards for people who embody eight cardinal principles (including integrity, agility, and accountability); a $5,000 bonus for outstanding non-academic staff members; an engraved keychain and personal note from the president for everyone on their one-year work anniversary; an awards ceremony in which people from every level shared stories about their time at the university; and a campuswide event for all retiring faculty members.

• *Customized appreciation* – "Effective recognition must be authentic," says McClure, "so it's clear to the recipients and everyone else in the organization why it's being given and that it isn't just a perfunctory gesture. The best recognition is also personalized, highlighting particular contributions or dispositions that are valued." One university's supervisors met individually with colleagues and asked them which kind of recognition was most meaningful and followed up accordingly.

• *Not just from the boss* – "Not every recognition needs to be a big event or an official award," says McClure. "Sometimes all people need to feel valued on the job are small affirmations or casual gatherings to celebrate one another." One university organized informal *I'm Thankful for You* cards during Thanksgiving week and more than 400 were exchanged.

"The Lost Art of Praise" by Kevin McClure in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 14, 2025 (Vol. 71, #12, pp. 42-45); McClure can be reached at mcclurek@uncw.edu.

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6. Units to Build Data Literacy in Middle and High School

In this *Mathematics Teacher* article, Montana math teacher Corinne Thatcher Day says data literacy is a vital 21st-century skill. People need a good conceptual understanding of statistics for everything from spotting everyday errors – getting the wrong change at a checkout counter – to understanding a pandemic's exponential growth. Students also need to see how data can be skewed as a result of human prejudice, misunderstandings, and bias.

Day describes two ways she uses the American Statistical Association's Census at School platform to engage her rural middle- and high-school students, all of whom are Native American, in real-life data analysis. The ASA platform allows teachers and students to submit survey data and download data sets by state, country, grade level, gender, and year, using random samplers. It can generate survey data on people's age, height, commute time to school, hours spent doing homework, languages spoken, favorite food and sport, charities donated to, and even students' preferred superpowers. Here are Day's projects:

• *A middle-school geography unit* – Each student chose a state or country and used the Census at School to answer basic research questions about it – one categorical and one numerical – and then used basic measures of center and spread and double bar graphs and circle graphs to compare their data with their classmates. Students compiled a comprehensive Google document that Day printed and pasted into a book template from Studentreasures. A small grant paid for hardcover copies of the class book, to students' delight.

• *An algebra II unit* – Day's students used the online platform to figure out that their average height was taller than the average of almost every other eighth grade dataset they found. Day launched a unit to explore the current implications of a historical fact she unearthed: that in the 1800s, Plains tribes were the tallest, healthiest people in the world. As students explored this question, they summarized data in box plots and two-day frequency tables and discovered that they might indeed be among the tallest adolescents of their age in the world. "For my students," says Day, "whose Indigenous ancestors suffered incredible loss

at the hands of colonizers and who continue to experience discrimination in the present day, discovering that they have inherited the proud stature of their predecessors was uplifting."

"Using Census at School to Build Statistical Reasoning" by Corinne Thatcher Day in *Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12*, February 2025 (Vol. 118, #2, pp. 94-107); Day can be reached at corinneday@pryorstaff.org.

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7. How Are We Using "Time Windfalls" from ChatGPT?

In this *Harvard Business Review* article, Isabelle Engeler (University of Lausanne) and colleagues suggest four ways to think about the hours being saved by using generative artificial intelligence (one study found that managers are saving an average of 2 hours 46 minutes a week):

- Gather data; keep track of how much time was shaved off various tasks.
- Ask people to log the time saved compared to how it was spent before.
- Reallocate time to personal well-being, personal growth, and working on a project.
- Monitor how time is being redirected. Regular monitoring and feedback help everyone use and appreciate the gift of time from new technology.

"How Is Your Team Spending the Time Saved by Gen AI?" by Isabelle Engeler et al. in *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 2025 (Vol. 103, #2, pp. 23-26); Engeler can be reached at isabelle.engeler@unil.ch.

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8. Books About Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Struggle Outside the South

In this *School Library Journal* article, Alice Levine says many students know about the Jim Crow era and civil rights movement only in the South. She recommends ten picture books describing how this era unfolded in other parts of the U.S. (click the link below for cover images and commentary):

- *North of Dixie: Civil Rights Photography Beyond the South* by Mark Speltz
- *Going Places: Victor Hugo Green and His Glorious Book* by Tonya Bolden, illustrated by Eric Velasquez
- *Lizzie Demands a Seat! Elizabeth Jennings Fights for Streetcar Rights* by Beth Anderson, illustrated by E.B. Lewis
- *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks, Young Readers' Edition*, adapted by Brandy Colbert and Jeanne Theoharis
- *Step by Step!: How the Lincoln School Marchers Blazed a Trail to Justice* by Debbie Rigaud and Carlotta Penn, illustrated by Nysha Lilly
- *The First Step: How One Girl Put Segregation on Trial* by Susan Goodman, illustrated by E.B. Lewis
- *Without Separation: Prejudice, Segregation, and the Case of Roberto Alvarez* by Larry Dane Brimner, illustrated by Maya Gonzalez

- *Mamie Tape Fights to Go to School: Based on a True Story* by Traci Huahn, illustrated by Michelle Jing Chan
- *The Color of a Lie* by Kim Johnson
- *The Port Chicago 50: Disaster, Mutiny, and the Fight for Civil Rights* by Steve Sheinkin

"Jim Crow in the North" by Alice Levine in *School Library Journal*, February 2025 (Vol. 71, #2, pp. 31-33)

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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
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Exceptional Children
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Kappan (Phi Delta Kappan)
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Language Magazine
Learning for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance)
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher: Learning & Teaching PK-12
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Principal
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Journal of the Learning Sciences
The Language Educator
The Learning Professional (formerly Journal of Staff Development)
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Urban Education