Marshall Memo 800

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 26, 2019

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"As a country, we give the least to the students who need the most. Students from low-income backgrounds and students of color get less access to quality early-childhood education, less access to well-prepared and well-supported teachers, less access to a well-rounded education that extends beyond English and math, less access to advanced coursework, less access to school counselors, and less access to supports so that they can successfully transition to postsecondary opportunities."

John King Jr. in "Our Future Depends on Doing Better," an interview with Kate Stoltzfus in *Education Update*, August 2019, https://bit.ly/2ZvPhUO

"Few things in organizational life are more dangerous than speaking truth to power. But isolated leaders become arrogant, indulgent, and authoritarian."

Dan Rockwell (see item #8)

"We teach human beings who are inspired by wonder, driven toward community, beset by fears and anxieties, and influenced in countless other ways by aspects of their lives beyond the purely cognitive."

James Lang (see item #1)

"Creativity is fueled by curiosity and passion."

Laura Entis (see item #6)

"It is time that we more deeply examine how our understandings of history are formed, and how we might go about bringing greater intellectual honesty and care to the work of teaching children."

Harper Keenan (see item #4)

1. How to Get Off to a Strong Start with Students, Part 1

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, James Lang (Assumption College) says that students form lasting impressions of their teachers in the opening minutes of a course. "Their early, thin-slice judgments," says Lang, "are powerful enough to condition their attitudes toward the entire course, the effort they are willing to put into it, and the relationship they will have with you and their peers throughout the semester. So that first class meeting is a big deal." How can you make a positive impression and give students "a taste of the engaging intellectual journey they will undertake in the coming weeks"? Lang suggests these guiding principles:

• *Spark curiosity*. Start by posing foundational questions such as, *Why does this course matter? How does it connect to the outside world?* Talk about what first hooked you on the discipline and make connections to what might fascinate students. Then and only then hand out the syllabus and show how upcoming learning experiences will address those deeper issues.

• *Build community*. "We teach human beings who are inspired by wonder, driven toward community, beset by fears and anxieties, and influenced in countless other ways by aspects of their lives beyond the purely cognitive," says Lang. "For both you and your students, those emotions will be at a peak on the first day of the semester, and they can have a significant influence on what happens in your classroom." Some basic steps:

- Humanize yourself by telling about your own intellectual journey and using appropriate self-disclosure and humor.
- Greet each student as they come to class and get them talking about themselves.
- Give students a chance to communicate with each other. This doesn't have to be "the dreaded icebreaker," says Lang; just have them chat in pairs or small groups.

"The more comfortable the students feel with you and one another from the beginning," he avers, "the more comfortable they will be participating throughout the semester."

• *Get students doing cognitive work on Day One*. Counterintuitively, it's helpful to ask students to solve a problem or answer a question before it's been taught. This challenges them to draw on prior knowledge, creates fertile ground for learning, previews what's coming, and gives you a sense of what they already know. It's also helpful to get students thinking about the course in metacognitive terms (without freaking them out by using the word metacognitive). What were the characteristics of the most engaging and least effective classes they've had in this subject? What learning strategies do they anticipate using in this class? What conditions will make them successful?

• *Be clear about expectations*. Highlight key items in the syllabus, including required materials, quizzes and assessments, grading policies, visiting speakers, excursions, and key dates and deadlines.

• *Learn about students*. Study the class roster and ask students to introduce themselves via a discussion post, a short video, or an e-mail. "Being able to recognize and make connections with students on the first day will go a long way toward creating that strong sense of community in the course," says Lang.

• *Check out the space*. It's a good idea to explore every angle of your classroom, conference room, or auditorium. Lang recommends standing at the front, writing something on the board, finding a horizontal space for materials, walking around the perimeter to check out sightlines, and sitting in a chair at the rear. All this will calm your jitters and give you a student's-eye view of your teaching.

• *Check out the technology*. It's equally important to make sure you can independently connect your laptop, get Internet access, adjust video volume, and use response devices.

• *Think about wardrobe choices*. "Like it or not. students will notice what you are wearing and how you present yourself on the first day of class," says Lang. Formal or informal? First name or "Doctor"?

Next week: Lang's content-specific suggestions for English composition, history, mathematics, and psychology, and tips for learning management systems.

"How to Teach a Good First Day of Class: Advice Guide" by James Lang in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 24, 2019, https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/advice-firstday; Lang can be reached at lang@assumption.edu.

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2. Welcoming Students with Special Needs in General-Ed Classrooms

In this *Cult of Pedagogy* article, Jennifer Gonzalez interviews Jahmeelah Gamble, a Toronto-based expert on students with disabilities. Here are her suggestions for teachers working in inclusive classrooms:

• *Express your fears and concerns*. Many teachers feel ill-equipped to deal skillfully in classes with a range of learning differences, and that can be a problem. "You have to admit if you're nervous," says Gamble. "You have to admit if you have worries. Then you can find the right people who could help you get over those fears." At the top of the list is talking to students' parents about their children, how their summer was, school experiences the previous year, goals for this year, and how out-of-school activities can support the curriculum.

• *Consult with school support specialists regularly*. They have training, experience, and insights that can be valuable.

• *Design activities that challenge all students*. Most of the time classroom activities have to be modified to accommodate students with special needs. But occasionally it's cool to flip the dynamic. Gamble describes having a student with visual impairments in her class and creating a sensory challenge in which everyone was blindfolded and had to touch different objects and try to guess what they were. Then they did a scavenger hunt around the classroom

– "four steps to the left. Three to the right. Stop. Put your arm in front of you" – so they could experience what it was like to move around the world without sight.

• *Understand parents' discomfort and fear*. "Some of these parents just received a diagnosis," says Gamble, "so they're going through their own guilt and denial and embarrassment and shame, and all those types of emotions." This might manifest itself in avoiding meetings, not speaking, or exhibiting challenging attitudes and behaviors. It's important to withhold judgment and say things like, "I need you. I need you to meet me halfway. I want you to be invested in this, because I'm invested in your child… If you really want me to do the magic I'm capable of doing, I need you in on this with me, and if there's things that you're scared about, if there's things you're unsure about, let's get through this together."

• *Read books with students that promote diversity and inclusion*. "We don't want to wait until Autism Awareness Month or Down Syndrome Awareness Month," says Gamble. "This needs to be a weekly thing that we talk about being different and promoting differences and celebrating it as a uniqueness and not something that we have to be cautious about." Here are some books she and Gonzalez recommend:

- *My Brother Charlie* by Holly Robinson Peete and Ryan Elizabeth Peete, illustrated by Shane Evans.
- *Some Monsters Are Different* by David Milgrim
- *My Friend with Autism* by Beverly Bishop, illustrated by Craig Bishop
- *Just Because* by Rebecca Elliott
- *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper
- *The Running Dream* by Wendelin Van Draanen
- *El Deafo* by Cece Bell

"Creating a Welcoming Classroom for Students with Special Needs" by Jennifer Gonzalez and Jahmeelah Gamble in *The Cult of Pedagogy*, November 20, 2016, https://www.cultofpedagogy.com/welcoming-special-ed

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3. Who Gets the Most Qualified and Experienced Teachers?

"A growing global consensus has coalesced around the idea that teachers are the key to students' academic success, school quality, and even national economic growth," say Dong Wook Jeong (Seoul National University) and Thomas Luschei (Claremont Graduate University) in this *Teachers College Record* article. "Evidence also suggests that providing economically disadvantaged children with consistent access to qualified teachers represents one of the few effective school-based policy levers to close socioeconomic and racial achievement gaps."

Jeong and Luschei report on their study of how teachers end up in different kinds of schools and classrooms in the U.S. and South Korea. Their findings:

• In South Korea, teacher assignments *across* schools are much more equitable than in the U.S. because of centralized control of teacher assignments, mandatory rotation of teachers from school to school, and significant financial incentives to teach in difficult-to-staff schools.

• *Within* South Korean schools, vulnerable students are less likely to have experienced and qualified teachers. Although Korean teachers spend less time in each school because of mandatory rotation, teachers with more seniority and qualifications use informal channels to get what they consider desirable classroom assignments – that is, working with higher-achieving, more economically advantaged, and better-behaved students.

• In U.S. schools, this is true both *within and among* schools. Teachers with more experience and better qualifications are less likely to be working in classrooms and schools with higher concentrations of language-minority students, economically disadvantaged students, students with special needs, and students with behavior challenges. The mechanism is the same as in South Korea, say Jeong and Luschei (citing Lankford et al., 2002): "Teachers with the greatest qualifications – and as a result, the most options – negotiate locally with school principals or districts to secure positions in schools with the most pleasant teaching conditions, including high-achieving students. Teachers with the fewest options find themselves in schools with more-difficult working conditions, including higher proportions of low-income, minority, and low-achieving students."

To tackle these equity challenges, Jeong and Luschei suggest integrating low-income, special-needs, language-minority, and other vulnerable students so there aren't significant differences among classrooms, thus mitigating preference-based teacher sorting.

"Teacher Sorting Within and Across Schools and Nations: A Comparative Study of South Korea and the United States" by Dong Wook Jeong and Thomas Luschei in *Teachers College Record*, August 2019 (Vol. 121, #8, pp. 1-40), available for purchase at https://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentId=22708; the authors can be reached at jeongdw@snu.ac.kr and thomas.luschei@cgu.edu.

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4. How Should Elementary Students Be Taught About Historical Violence?

In this *Teachers College Record* article, Harper Keenan (University of British Columbia) asks how elementary school history textbooks cover violence – revolution, war, conquest, colonization, slavery. Jerome Bruner famously said that "any subject can be taught effectively in some *intellectually honest* form to any child at any stage of development" (1960). But what does that mean for curriculum material dealing with troubling topics? As a case study, Keenan looked at four elementary social studies textbooks approved for purchase in California schools – Houghton Mifflin, McGraw-Hill, Harcourt, and Scott Foresman – to see how they dealt with the Spanish colonization of the state.

What emerged? "First," says Keenan, "children are being taught, albeit minimally, about violence in California's mission period. Second, the representation of that violence disproportionately presents California Indians as perpetrators and the Spanish as victims, a framing incongruous with the historical record… These textbooks present official history that

re-naturalizes colonization as an unquestionably rational way of reorganizing the world, and positions Indigenous peoples as engaging in irrational violence, rather than acting in response to that which they understood as a threat to their livelihood. The narratives the textbooks present obscure extraordinary devastation and destruction for California Indians and their ancestral land, and do not provide adequate context for the causes of either Spanish- or California-Indian-enacted violence."

Keenan describes what happens in California classrooms that use such textbooks. In the winter of 2016, a San Jose newspaper celebrated the culmination of a grade four project-based learning unit about the Spanish colonial period. Students combined geology, social studies, art, and technology in a lighthearted portrayal of establishing a new mission. To complete the project successfully, students had to study Native Americans in California to see if they were "friendly and hard-working" or might revolt against the planned mission. The school's principal, in full costume as a Spanish archbishop, judged the projects. "As they strategized about how to control or avoid Native American uprisings," says Keenan, "the students were being trained in a form of colonial strategy… Left unexamined in the article, or, one might infer, in the project the children enacted, is the question of *why* California Indians resisted the construction of the Spanish mission system." Projects like this have beeen popular in California elementary schools.

"Why might this be, and what are we to do about it?" asks Keenan. Despite state curriculum frameworks that call for balanced historical accounts, the next generation of textbooks dealing with this era appear to repeat the errors of the past. Keenan, formerly an elementary teacher, and the great-great-grandson of a European settler portrayed in family lore as a hero, believes the solution lies in children being invited "into practicing the work of rigorous, active, and authentic historical inquiry – *What happened, and why? How might we find out? What does this mean for us today?*" That means equipping teachers with source documents and pedagogy that would allow them to give students a balanced, grade-appropriate view of what really happened.

"It is time that we more deeply examine how our understandings of history are formed," Keenan concludes, "and how we might go about bringing greater intellectual honesty and care to the work of teaching children."

"Selective Memory: California Mission History and the Problem of Historical Violence in Elementary School Textbooks" by Harper Keenan in *Teachers College Record*, August 2019 (Vol. 121, #8, pp. 1-28), available for purchase at https://bit.ly/2NzMkwe; Keenan can be reached at harper.keenan@ubc.ca.

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5. Why Have Students Keep a Hard-Copy Journal?

In this *Edutopia* article, English teacher Beth Pandolpho says why she believes students should keep a pen-and-paper notebook in class, even if they all have laptops or tablets:

• *The notebook itself* – "Reflective writing deserves to be preserved in a format that resists the removal of pages," says Pandolpho; "this writing cannot be deleted with the press of

a key… There are no rules, no judgments, and no spell-check. Our only work is to clarify our thoughts, discover new ideas, and in the process become a better version of ourselves. " Her students' notebooks have "smudges, smears, cuts, bruises, and triumphs," testament to their work throughout the year. At the outset, Pandolpho has students write inside their notebook covers, *I have the right to write badly in this notebook* and *Writing is a way to think your way to a better self*.

• *The act of putting pen to paper* – "Writing by hand is a deliberate act, and it takes time," she says. "As we craft each letter, our thoughts slowly unfold on the page. Our words reveal feelings we hadn't before considered, and our sentences lead us to clarity… Our journals preserve these new understandings with a tangible reminder that mirrors our process."

• *An opening to conversation* – As students write in their notebooks, they are often timorous and self-conscious. Then they share with their table group, building confidence for possibly sharing in a whole-class discussion. The low-stakes format of the journals is a key step.

• *Teacher-student conferences* – At the end of each marking period, Pandolpho meets with students individually to check their journals, and they page through to find one entry they'd like to discuss. "This year," she says, "one student shared with me the pressures he was enduring at home, and another told me about her crushing loss in running for president of the Class Council. These are not small things, and sharing private thoughts on the written page forges a special connection between a teacher and student."

Pandolpho is no Luddite. Students regularly put away their journals, fire up their Chromebooks, and write for a larger audience. "The epiphanies from our journals," she says, "provide the seeds to formulate arguments, envision narratives, and reflect on how our class texts can provide further clarity in our writing and our lives. We craft these pieces together in class, and share our writing through Google Docs. Peer editors provide suggestions, and I jump in and out of students' documents to offer support, encouragement, and feedback. Our writing becomes a collaborative process as we prepare to showcase our work, whether it's for a class blog, a social media platform, or a national writing content. Journal writing is where we begin, and writing for the real world is our destination."

"Journaling the Old-School Way" by Beth Pandolpho in *Edutopia*, November 16, 2017, https://www.edutopia.org/article/journaling-old-school-way

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6. Capturing Our Own – and Our Students' – Creative Inspirations

In this *Adobe 99U* article, Laura Entis says that preventing brilliant thoughts from slipping away takes "patience, craftiness, and sometimes brute force." She shares advice from several people who have learned how to catch such moments and build them into projects, products, or a series of creative endeavors:

• *Pay attention*. Be open to ideas from unexpected places and be ready to grab them if they have promise. While on a family vacation, illustrator Kyle Webster stepped on a jagged

seashell and cut his foot. While nursing the wound, he had the idea of writing a children's book about pain and how the world is full of "ouch" moments.

• *Write it down*. The act of recording a momentary inspiration, says Entis, "bridges the gap between the stream-of-conscious chaos that can generate creative ideas and the structure required to turn them into something real." The medium has to be something that's always accessible – a 3x5 card, notebook, sketchbook, tablet, phone, or audio device.

• *Put a stake in the ground*. Having decided to pursue an idea, it's good to make it public – perhaps telling friends or posting it on a website – to encourage forward momentum and hold yourself accountable.

• *Create boundaries*. An action-forcing deadline can be helpful, and constraints on materials and formats can actually boost creativity.

• *Map it out*. Projects need to be broken into chunks, and a schedule can help keep things on track. But for creative people, schedules are just suggestions; we need to be flexible as inspiration waxes and wanes.

• *Ask for feedback*. "Creativity is often portrayed as a solitary endeavor," says Entis, "in which an artist's singular vision is the key to a work's success. But creativity also thrives on collaboration. A sounding board can help you refine your vision, making the end product stronger."

• *Go down rabbit holes*. "Creativity is fueled by curiosity and passion," says Entis. Once you have an idea that excites you, go for it.

"How to Turn a Creative Spark Into Something Real" by Laura Entis in *Adobe 99U*, August 20, 2019, https://adobe.ly/2zmAk8X

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7. Pointers on Writing an Effective CV

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Leonard Cassuto (Fordham University) says that a curriculum vitae is a record of your life and also "a passport through that life, one you'll have to show to gatekeepers over and over." Here is Cassuto's advice on polishing this key document:

• *Focus and customize*. "Keep in mind," he says, "that every unnecessary item on your vita threatens, by its very presence, to distract your reader from the necessary stuff."

• *Remember that you're combining autobiography and an argument in favor of you*. The purpose might be getting a promotion, winning a grant, or getting a fellowship.

• *Put your educational credentials first*. Don't annoy your readers by burying this important information.

• *Front-load the most important entries*. That might be an award you won or a particularly relevant service project.

• *Assume that your CV will be skimmed*. "Consider that most people going through a stack of applications will spend only a couple of minutes reading each CV – if that," says Cassuto. "You can't change that fact, so accommodate to it instead: Write to be skimmed."

• *Write visually*. Attend to the "visual balance between text and white space," he advises, and "use formatting thoughtfully to create emphasis." That includes indenting, boldfacing, and underlining – in moderation. Above all, avoid big chunk of text: "When the skimming reader's eye encounters a long paragraph, it usually just bounces off it and drops downward to the next resting point."

• *Avoid inside baseball*. Jargon or content-specific terms may annoy readers and give the impression that you don't know who your audience is.

• *Use your CV to guide the interview you hope to land*. "Remember that an interview is a conversation about you," says Cassuto, "and your application provides the ingredients for that discussion." And be strategic, avoiding names and references that might lead to questions that will take the interview off track.

"Advice: 8 Tips to Improve Your CV" by Leonard Cassuto in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 23, 2019 (Vol. LXV, #40, pp. B1-B2), https://bit.ly/2Yd2Doo; Cassuto can be reached at lcassuto@erols.com.

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8. How to Tell Leaders What They Don't Want to Hear

"Few things in organizational life are more dangerous than speaking truth to power," says Dan Rockwell in this *Leadership Freak* article. "But isolated leaders become arrogant, indulgent, and authoritarian… Reluctance to speak the truth protects incompetence." That's why it's important to point out inconsistencies, provide tough feedback, and advocate for contrarian ideas.

But you have to tread carefully, says Rockwell. He suggests the following guidelines for giving feedback that might not be welcome:

• Pet the tiger. Show respect, appreciation, and alignment with the leader's agenda and organizational goals.

• Bring heart. Don't brag about being a straight shooter; just be honest when you talk with (not to) the boss.

• Be known for rowing with. "An arrogant, self-serving employee hasn't earned the right to be heard," says Rockwell.

• Speak for yourself, not others. Don't say, "Everyone thinks…" Just say, "I think…" or "I notice…"

• Always seek others' best interests. "If your feedback is just about making your life better," says Rockwell, "keep it to yourself."

• Embrace and model the organization's vision, mission, and values.

• If your advice is modified or rejected, get on board. "What you do when you don't get what you want tells everyone who you are," concludes Rockwell.

"7 Rules for Giving Feedback to the Boss and Surviving to Tell About It" by Dan Rockwell in *Leadership Freak*, August 21, 2019, https://bit.ly/2ZrXB3N

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9. Mastery by Working Smart

In this *Study Hacks* article, Cal Newport shares suggestions from an accomplished piano player who figured out how to make practice more efficient and effective:

• *Do what doesn't come easily*. In music, it's a "huge mistake" to play the piece from beginning to end, he says. The best musicians drill the most difficult parts and rarely play the whole piece.

• *To master a skill, master something harder*. Strong musicians find clever ways to "complicate" the difficult parts of their music, playing a passage with alternative accent patterns, speed, or rhythm.

• *Systematically eliminate weakness*. A pianist who was weaker on the physical components of the piano practiced using a mute keyboard.

• *Imagine perfection*. Strong musicians begin with an image of how a perfect performance will sound, feel, and look and play with a perfect mental image in mind. Less-accomplished musicians play the piece with a reactive mindset, trying to fix problems as they crop up.

"Flow Is the Opiate of the Mediocre: Advice on Getting Better from an Accomplished Piano Player" by Cal Newport in *Study Hacks*, December 23, 2011, https://bit.ly/2zqoAlC

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10. A Different Spin on the Time-Honored Back-to-School Question

In this article from *Retrieval Practice*, Pooja Agarwal suggests that instead of asking students what they did last summer, ask them, *What's one thing you learned last summer?* This simple switch accomplishes several things:

- Engages students in spaced retrieval practice as they remember key events;
- Sparks conversations with and among students;
- Builds relationships.

Agarwal has several other suggestions:

- Make it an entry ticket, ready to go at students' desks.
- Keep it no-stakes – there's no correct or incorrect answer.
- Ask students to think-pair-share.
- Use tech tools like Kahoot, PollEverywhere, or FlipGrid
- Extend the activity by asking students for *two* things they learned last summer.

"Don't Ask Students What They Did Over the Summer. Ask This Instead!" by Pooja Agarwal in *Retrieval Practice*, August 21, 2019, https://www.retrievalpractice.org

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11. Short Item:

More resources for the 1619 Project – This learning guide from the Pulitzer Center http://www.pulitzercenter.org/builder/lesson/reading-guide-quotes-key-terms-and-questions-26504 has

suggestions for effective use of the *New York Times* curriculum on the origins of slavery in the United States.

"Reading Guide: Quotes, Key Terms, and Questions" from The Pulitzer Center Education, August 13, 2019

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If you have feedback or suggestions,
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About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and other educators very well-informed on current research and effective practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 48 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, writer, and consultant lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 60 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are 50 issues a year). Every week there's a podcast and HTML version as well.

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

All Things PLC
American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
District Management Journal
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Next
Education Update
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
English Journal
Essential Teacher
Exceptional Children
Go Teach
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
Knowledge Quest
Language Arts
Literacy Today (formerly Reading Today)
Mathematics Teacher
Middle School Journal
Peabody Journal of Education
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Reading Research Quarterly
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Social Education
Social Studies and the Young Learner
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Education Gadfly
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 Magazine