Marshall Memo 548

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
August 18, 2014

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"I'm a public-school teacher and that's what I want to be. I want kids to trust me, listen to me. My students are fanatically devoted to Room 56 because they know I am. I'm not going anywhere. Stick through the bad years and get better at it. I'm not that good. I'm just experienced."

> Rafe Esquith, legendary Los Angeles fifth-grade teacher and author, in "Talking Heads" in *The New York Times Education Life* section, August 3, 2014, http://nyti.ms/1ArHMZF

"I've always believed that for every nonreader, there is a book just waiting to be discovered."

> Greg Neri (see item #3)

"The biggest take-away is that, so far, the Common Core holds up remarkably well to rigorous academic research."

> Michael Brickman in *The Education Gadfly*, August 13, 2014 (Vol. 14, #33) summarizing "A Compendium of Research on the Common Core State Standards" by Matthew Frizzell, Center for Education Policy, August 2014, http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=438

"Anyone who needs to listen to new information, be attentive to detail, think on their feet, and give clear directions needs adequate rest."

> Kristi Erdal (Colorado College) in "Just Thinking You Slept Poorly Can Hurt Your Performance" in *Harvard Business Review*, September 2014 (Vol. 92, #9, p. 30-31)

"Please tell me all the similes and metaphors, I need this information by Thursday."

> A letter from a student to author Lois Lowry, quoted in an interview by Jessica Gross in *The New York Times Magazine*, August 3, 2014, http://nyti.ms/1kOg71f

1. What's Missing in American Schools

In this article in *The Atlantic*, Newark teacher Sara Mosle reprises some familiar concerns about U.S. public education:

- Large numbers of Baby-Boomer teachers are on the brink of retirement.
- 40-50 percent of novice teachers quit within the first five years.
- Schools will need to hire more than 3 million teachers by 2020.
- Many schools of education are doing a dismal job preparing the next generation of educators.
- Once hired, new teachers are often left to sink or swim, and much professional development for all teachers is weak.
- Some states have adopted "value added" metrics in an attempt to winnow out the least-effective teachers, but VAM is controversial and unproven.
- There isn't a consensus on what makes an effective teacher, but there's an emerging consensus on factors that don't correlate with positive impact on students: years of teaching experience (beyond the first few); advanced degrees; passing state licensing exams; and some "obvious" personality traits, such as charisma and the ability to ham it up in the classroom.

The heart of Mosle's article is an appraisal of Elizabeth Green's new book, *Building a Better Teacher*, which Mosle believes is a timely explication of "a powerfully simple idea: that teaching is not some mystical talent but a set of best practices that can be codified and learned through extensive hands-on coaching, self-scrutiny, and collaboration." Sounds good – so why isn't this principle being put to work in all our schools?

Green's book has detailed descriptions of Deborah Ball's work as a young teacher helping students understand sophisticated math concepts – for example, Do two odd integers always add up to an even number? Ball is now at the University of Michigan's School of Education helping new teachers get beyond rote memorization and skills practice and teach more effectively. This approach is like Japanese "lesson study", which involves intense teacher collaboration and, Green believes, is the reason that Japan's elementary schools are among the best in the world. Lesson study *should* work in the U.S. – so why hasn't it gotten much traction?

Green was initially attracted to the way educator Doug Lemov deconstructed teaching in his book *Teach Like a Champion: 49 Techniques That Put Students on the Path to College* (Jossey-Bass, 2010). But Green believes that Lemov's followers (many in charter schools)

went too far in the direction of strict discipline – no talking in hallways, silent lunches, suspensions for minor infractions. Follow-up studies of some schools implementing Lemov's ideas have shown a discouraging attrition rate – in one case, a class of 100 sixth graders numbered only 30 at graduation. Lemov believes that learning requires "the foundational ability to be quiet and listen," says Green. Japanese teachers believe that children need "structured opportunities to talk in order to learn." Green is convinced that Ball and Japanese teachers have found a better balance between discipline and student engagement.

"But Green's account cries out for a look at the bigger picture," says Mosle. Too few U.S. schools give teachers the team planning time necessary to implement something like lesson study. "The lack of time is an American anomaly," says Mosle. "Every single country that outperforms us has significantly smaller teacher workloads. Indeed, on the scale of time devoted by teachers to in-class instruction annually, the United States is off the charts. We spend far more hours in the classroom on average, twice and nearly three times more in some cases, than teachers in any other OECD country save Chile."

In Finland, for example, high-school teachers spend 553 hours on classroom instruction; in Japan, the number is 500; in the U.S., it's 1,051 hours. In elementary and middle schools, American teachers are similarly locked into schedules that leave insufficient time for transformational collaboration. "In practice," says Mosle, "this means that most teachers in this country have zero time to work together on new pedagogical approaches and share feedback in the way Green advocates in her book. They rarely have an opportunity to watch other teachers teach, the single best kind of training, in my experience; they're too busy in their own classrooms (not to mention outside them).

"The goal isn't to lighten teachers' load but to redistribute it," concludes Mosle. "[I]f teaching is to be a profession of the mind (as well as of the heart) that retains top talent and delivers results on the same level that other countries boast, the people who spend hours with our children in the classroom also need what they currently don't get: the hours with peers and mentors that are essential to improving their craft."

"Building Better Teachers" by Sara Mosle in *The Atlantic*, September 2014 (Vol. 314, #2, p. 42-44); http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/09/building-better-teachers/375066/; for Elizabeth Green's *New York Times* article that launched Doug Lemov's book, *Teach Like a Champion*, see Memo 326.

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2. Creating a Sense of "Us"

"Humans are social creatures," says retired CEO George Halvorson in this *Harvard Business Review* article. "We fall readily into group loyalties. We instinctively divide the world into 'us' and 'them' and treat others very differently according to which category they're in… I am convinced that great leadership in the 21st century is a matter of endowing groups of individuals with a satisfying sense of us and channeling their collective energy productively toward noble ends." Halvorson cites research on how a sense of group identity and allegiance can improve morale and productivity.

"But of course it isn't enough to simply declare to a collection of individuals that they are a team," he says. "If leaders want to see those instinctive energies kick in, they must give people a sense of *why* they exist as a group." There are three ways of doing this:

- Kinship
- Mission
- A common enemy

Kinship is a frequent route to group identity: we're all engineers, radiologists, sixth-grade teachers. "Doing similar work under the same conditions is enough to make an us," says Halvorson. "But it doesn't provide much impetus for the group to align its energies to take bold action." A compelling mission does much better – for example:

- *Our job is to make sure those buildings are as clean as we would want them for our own family.*
- *Our mission is to prepare students to enter, succeed in, and graduate from college.*

A persuasive and valuable mission statement gives people a context for their actions and empowers them to support one another's efforts and fully engage their talents and imagination.

Motivating people by directing their energy against a common enemy is often effective, but it has downsides. "When there is a clear loser in some setting, there is inherent instability," says Halvorson. "The loser often works doubly hard to reverse the situation and even to exact revenge. The energy on both sides can quickly turn purely destructive."

"Getting to 'Us'" by George Halvorson in *Harvard Business Review*, September 2014 (Vol. 92, #9, p. 38), no e-link available

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3. A Middle-School Boy's Journey from Trouble to Poetry

In this article in *School Library Journal,* a Florida school librarian, a well-known author of young-adult books, and a middle-school student describe how the student came to be a poet. The author, Greg Neri, remembers how he himself tuned out on reading in fifth grade when the books he was asked to read no longer had illustrations. But when a teacher suggested he read *The Phantom Tollbooth*, "my whole idea of what a book was went out the window," says Neri. "It was a revelation. That teacher had recognized who I was and matched me with a book that would speak to me. That was the start of a long, powerful journey into reading, and eventually, writing… I've always believed that for every nonreader, there is a book just waiting to be discovered. Often, it's a teacher or librarian who facilitates that match-up."

The librarian, Kimberly DeFusco, describes how the student, Raequon, was disruptive and disdainful of reading. One day she walked him down to her office and became annoyed when he was looking away from her, staring at something on the wall. "Is there something up there more interesting than listening to me?" she demanded. "Isn't that G. Neri?" Raequon asked, looking at a photograph of DeFusco with Greg Neri. When DeFusco confirmed that she had posed for a picture with the author, the boy said he loved Neri's book, *Chess Rumble*, and had read it over and over in fifth grade. "All of a sudden, it was like I was talking to a

completely different Raequon," says DeFusco. "He lit up, talking about how he related to the character Marcus and how he was jealous of me for having met G. Neri."

For the next two years, Raequon continued to be a "vocal nonreader" in class, but he frequently visited the library, checked out books, and hid them in his book bag so other students wouldn't see them. DeFusco convinced him to read *Poems and Writings by Teenage Boys* by Betsy Franco (Candlewick, 2000) and Raequon became obsessed with poetry. He checked out hefty anthologies of poems and started reading Shakespeare. Asked about a poem by the Bard he particularly liked, Raequon couldn't remember the title. "I don't know exactly," he said, "'cause it was hard to read, but that man really loved that woman – more than you should love someone. It was *good*."

Raequon was eager to meet Greg Neri, but the next time the author visited the school, Raequon was out on suspension. Neri made another visit, and this time Raequon got his picture taken with the author and had him sign a copy of *Chess Rumble*. During his sixth-grade year, Raequon began writing poetry, and by seventh grade, he had filled two notebooks. But his life as a poet was a closely guarded secret. "Raequon had made a conscious decision to not be 'smart' in middle school so he wouldn't be bullied," says DeFusco. "He put on this tough-guy, joker persona and started goofing off in school. He did not want anyone to know he was a poet." He was constantly in trouble for disrupting class, and it was difficult for DeFusco to defend him.

Then Neri made another visit to the school, and in a private conversation convinced Raequon to share his writing – which was sometimes about his difficult home situation – in his classes. Teachers and peers were impressed with his writing, and Raequon's grades went from Ds and Fs to As and Bs. When he told DeFusco he'd been accepted into a high-school creative writing program, he had tears in his eyes. "Will you tell Greg?" he asked.

"People are surprised when I say I write poems," says Raequon. "They say, 'You don't look like a writer.' Well, what does a writer look like?"

"The Author, the Librarian, and the Poet" by Greg Neri, Kimberly DeFusco, and Raequon in *School Library Journal*, August 2014 (Vol. 60, #8, p. 10-12), www.slj.com

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4. A Program to Address Out-of-School Barriers to Learning

In this article in *American Educational Research Journal*, Mary Walsh and George Madaus (Boston College) and six other researchers report on their study of City Connects, a program designed to provide support for students in high-poverty elementary schools facing non-academic challenges. Historically, say the authors, student support in schools has been uneven and uncoordinated. City Connects was launched in 1999 to implement a better approach in a number of Boston Public Schools. By 2014 the program was in 17 elementary buildings (and several in Springfield, Massachusetts, which were not part of this study).

City Connects involves a full-time School Site Coordinator in each school (a licensed school counselor or social worker) who:

- Works with classroom teachers to conduct a thorough needs assessment of all students' academic, social/emotional, family, and health strengths and needs;
- Collaborates with families, teachers, school staff, and community agencies to connect high-need students to a customized set of prevention, intervention, and enrichment services provided by the school district and community agencies;
- Tracks student outcomes through middle and high school.

What were the findings? Walsh and her colleagues report that students served by City Connects had significantly higher report-card grades in grades 3 to 5 and also in middle schools (where they were no longer served by the program). Sizable improvements in standardized test scores occurred in grades 6-8 (effect size .33). The data showed that the longer students were involved in City Connects services, the better their middle-school outcomes.

Why didn't test-score gains show up till middle school? "One reason for this may be that teachers first recognized incremental improvements in student academic skills, improvements that were not yet substantial enough to be detectable on the tests," say Walsh and her colleagues. "Another may be that an early result of addressing students' nonacademic strengths and needs was improvement in noncognitive skills that led to later improvements in test scores."

"It appears," conclude the authors, "that if a student support intervention changes, by design, the delivery of student support in elementary school, it can change middle school outcomes… City Connects reinvents the work traditionally done by school counselors, social workers, nurses, and others who support students. In contrast to a case management approach, it serves all students in a school, not just those most in need, and community partners, rather than school-based staff, are engaged to carry out treatment and follow up with students and their families… This approach aligns with the view that the future of school counseling and student support more generally may 'lie less in individual and small-group counseling and more in system change that enables counselors to focus on providing students with better [access to] opportunities.'"

"A New Model for Student Support in High-Poverty Urban Elementary Schools: Effects on Elementary and Middle School Academic Outcomes" by Mary Walsh, George Madaus, Anastasia Raczek, Eric Dearing, Claire Foley, Chen An, Terrence Lee-St. John, and Albert Beaton in *American Educational Research Journal*, August 2014 (Vol. 51, #4, p. 704-737), http://aer.sagepub.com/content/current; Walsh can be reached at mary.walsh@bc.edu; the City Connects website is at http://www.bc.edu/schools/lsoe/cityconnects/.

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5. Are Elementary Schools Sowing Seeds of Mathematical Confusion?

"'Always' rules are not so 'always'," say Karen Karp (University of Louisville), Sarah Bush (Bellarmine University), and Barbara Dougherty (University of Missouri) in this article in *Teaching Children Mathematics*. Well-intentioned elementary teachers have their students memorize rules and procedures that seem to make sense at the moment, but a few years later,

students find out that the rules aren't always true. "Such experiences can be frustrating," say Karp, Bush, and Dougherty, "and, in students' minds, can further the notion that mathematics is a mysterious series of tricks and tips to memorize rather than big concepts that relate to one another." The teaching missteps fall into these categories:

- Overgeneralizing commonly accepted strategies;
- Using imprecise vocabulary;
- Relying on tips and tricks that do not promote conceptual understanding.

Here are 13 examples of what the authors call "rules that expire" indicating where in the Common Core math standards new understandings are introduced:

• When you multiply a number by ten, just add a zero to the end of the number.

- Why the rule is taught: It simplifies multiplying whole numbers by 10.
- When the rule isn't true: Multiplying decimals – for example, 0.25 x 10 = 2.5, not 0.250
- The "expiration date": Grade 5 (Common Core 5.NBT.2)

• Use keywords to solve word problems.

- Why the rule is taught: It provides shortcuts that help students translate word problems into symbolic, computational form. For example, students are taught when they see the word *altogether*, they should add, when they see *left*, they should subtract.
- When the rule isn't true: Some keywords may be used in different ways. Many students would be confused by this problem: *John had 14 marbles in his left pocket. He had 37 marbles in his right pocket. How many marbles did John have?* The keywords approach is particularly problematic when students start to work with multistep problems.
- The "expiration date": Grade 3 (Common Core 3.OA.8)

• You cannot take a bigger number from a smaller number.

- Why the rule is taught: It's a good rule of thumb when working with whole numbers.
- When the rule isn't true: When students encounter word problems involving integers and negative numbers – for example: *A grocery story manager keeps the temperature of the produce section at 4 degrees Celsius, but this is 22 degrees too hot for the frozen food section. What must the temperature be in the frozen food section?*
- The "expiration date": Grade 7 (Common Core 7.NS.1)

• Addition and multiplication make numbers bigger:

- Why the rule is taught: To give students number sense in the early grades.
- When the rule isn't true: Multiplying by zero; adding two negative numbers (-3 + -2 = -5); multiplying fractions (1/4 x 1/3 = 1/12); when one of the factors is a negative number and the other is positive (-3 x 8 = -24)
- The "expiration date": Grade 5 (Common Core 5.NF.4) and again in Grade 7 (Common Core 7.NS.1 and 7.NS.2)

• Subtraction and division make numbers smaller.

- Why the rule is taught: Again, as a rule of thumb with simple computation (often in Grade 3)

- When the rule isn't true: Subtracting two negative numbers (-5 – (-8) = 3); dividing fractions (1/4 ÷ 2/5 = 5/8); dividing two negative factors (-9 ÷ -3 = 3)
- The "expiration date": Grade 6 (Common Core 6.NS.1) and again in Grade 7 (Common Core 7.NS.1 and 7.NS.2c)

• You always divide the larger number by the smaller number.

- Why the rule is taught: To simplify division of whole numbers in pure computation.
- When the rule isn't true: With problems like this one: *Kate has 2 cookies to divide up among herself and two friends (2 ÷ 3); Jayne has ½ of a pizza and wants to share it with her brother. What portion of the whole pizza will each get?* (1/2 ÷ 2 = 1/4)
- The "expiration date": Grade 5 (Common Core 5.NF.3 and 5.NF.7)

• Two negatives make a positive.

- Why the rule is taught: With multiplication and division of integers, it helps students determine the sign of the product or quotient.
- When the rule isn't true: The rule doesn't work with problems like -5 + (-3) = -8
- The "expiration date": Grade 7 (Common Core 7.NS.1)

• Multiply everything inside the parentheses by the number outside the parentheses.

- Why the rule is taught: This holds true when the numbers or variables inside the parentheses are being added or subtracted – the distributive property is being used.
- When the rule isn't true: When multiplication or division occurs in the parentheses
- The "expiration date": Grade 5 (Common Core 5.OA.1)

• Improper fractions should always be written as a mixed number.

- Why the rule is taught: This is intended to help students visualize how many *wholes* and *parts* the number represents.
- When the rule isn't true: When students begin using improper fractions to compute and when they learn about the slope of a line and must represent the slope as a rise/run, which is sometimes appropriately and usefully expressed as an improper fraction.
- The "expiration date": Grade 5 (Common Core 5.NF.1) and again in Grade 7 (7.RP.2)

• The number you say first in counting is always less than the number that comes next.

- Why the rule is taught: In the early grades, students are taught that number relationships are always fixed – for example, the relationship between 3 and 8 is always the same.
- When the rule isn't true: When units are different – for example, three dozen eggs is more than eight eggs, and three feet is more than eight inches.
- The "expiration date": Grade 2 (Common Core 2.MD.2)

• The longer the number, the larger the number

- Why the rule is taught: With whole numbers, this is a good rule of thumb.
- When the rule isn't true: With decimals – for example, 0.273 is not larger than 0.6
- The "expiration date": Grade 4 (Common Core 4.NF.7)

• Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally.

- Why the rule is taught: It's a helpful mnemonic to remember the order of operations.
- When the rule isn't true: (a) It's not true that you always do multiplication before division and addition before subtraction; (b) The order is not that strict; and (c) The P in

PEMDAS suggests that parentheses are first, rather than grouping symbols more generally, which would include brackets, braces, square root symbols, and the horizontal fraction bar.

- The "expiration date": Grade 6 (Common Core 6.EE.2)

• The equal sign means *Find the answer* or *Write the answer*.

- Why the rule is taught: With simple computation in the early grades – for example, 6 + 5 = ___, students get the idea that the equal sign is a signal to *compute the answer*.
- When the rule isn't true: The equal sign is actually a relational symbol indicating that the two quantities on either side represent the same amount.
- The "expiration date": Grade 1 (Common Core 1.OA.7)

Karp, Bush, and Dougherty also suggest the following changes in mathematical nomenclature:

• In addition and subtraction, from *borrowing* or *carrying* to *trading* or *regrouping*.

• In fractions, from __ *out of* __ to referring to the fraction and the attribute – for example, *one-seventh of the length of the string*.

• From *reducing* fractions to *simplifying* fractions.

• From asking how shapes are *similar* to asking *How are these shapes the same and how are they different?*

• From reading the equal sign as *makes* (*two plus two makes four*) to *equals* or *is the same as*.

• From saying a number *divides evenly into* another to saying it *divides a whole number of times* or *divides without a remainder*.

• From *plugging a number* into an expression or equation to *substituting values* for an unknown.

• From using *top number* or *bottom number* for numerator and denominator to *seeing a fraction as one number and using the correct terms*.

"As teachers are planning how to teach according to new standards," conclude the authors, "now is a critical point to think about the rules that should and should not be used in an effort to teach in ways that do not 'expire.'"

"13 Rules That Expire" by Karen Karp, Sarah Bush, and Barbara Dougherty in *Teaching Children Mathematics*, August 2014 (Vol. 21, #1, p. 18-25), www.nctm.org; Karp can be reached at Karen@louisville.edu, Bush at sbush@bellarmine.edu.

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6. Comments on New York State's Common Core-Aligned Tests

In this *Education Gadfly* article, Robert Pondiscio offers a critique of New York State's 2014 ELA and math tests (the state education department recently released half of the items). Pondiscio says the tests were challenging and some of the questions were confusing, but he brushes aside the criticism they were developmentally inappropriate. "'Hard' and 'developmentally inappropriate' are not synonyms," he says.

His biggest concern is with some of the reading passages. "It's unfair and unnecessary," he says, "to risk confusing children with topics – sailing, BMX racing, snowshoeing – that low-income urban children, in particular, are likely to know little about and have no out-of-

school experience with… The most important and powerful breakthrough in Common Core is the standards' clear guidance that 'by reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all content areas.' If this is what is expected, reading passages ought to encourage and validate good instructional choices."

"New York's Common Core Tests: Tough Questions, Curious Choices" by Robert Pondiscio in *The Education Gadfly*, August 13, 2014 (Vol. 14, #33), http://edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-weekly

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7. A Study of KIPP Schools

In this *Education Gadfly* review, Robert Pondiscio reports on a new Mathematica study that found higher achievement in KIPP charter schools cannot be attributed to the schools pushing out low-achieving students or "creaming" incoming students. The Mathematica authors acknowledge that they were not able to factor in whether the parents who are attracted to KIPP schools tend to be more motivated and supportive than parents who send their children to regular public schools.

"Nevertheless," says Pondiscio, "the criticism rankles. Do low-income children not deserve the opportunity to attend school with others who are motivated and whose parents are ambitious for their children? Some will no doubt continue to begrudge low-income black and Hispanic children their success, discounting it unless they overcome not just the disadvantage of poverty but classrooms filled with the disengaged and disruptive. But no matter. Perhaps a future study might explore why some are so determined to deny ambitious have-nots what affluent families give their kids by paying tuition or moving."

"Study: Does Student Attrition Explain KIPP's Success?" by Robert Pondiscio in *The Education Gadfly*, August 13, 2014 (Vol. 14, #33), http://edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-weekly

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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 43 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 64 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).

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Core list of publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
AMLE Magazine
ASCA School Counselor
ASCD SmartBrief/Public Education NewsBlast
Better: Evidence-Based Education
Center for Performance Assessment Newsletter
District Administration
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Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
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Journal of Staff Development
Kappa Delta Pi Record
Knowledge Quest
Middle School Journal
NASSP Journal
NJEA Review
Perspectives
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Responsive Classroom Newsletter
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
School Administrator
School Library Journal
Teacher
Teachers College Record
Teaching Children Mathematics
Teaching Exceptional Children/Exceptional Children
The Atlantic
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The District Management Journal
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal/Learning System/Tools for Schools
The New York Times
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Time
Wharton Leadership Digest