Marshall Memo 336

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
May 17, 2010

In This Issue:

Quotes of the Week

"The literature is clear and compelling on the fact that summer is a season of huge risks and setbacks for low-income youths."

Ron Fairchild and Jeff Smink in "Is Summer School the Key to Reform?" in *Education Week*, *ibid*., e-link for subscribers only http://www.edweek.org

"What is the best lesson you taught in the last few weeks and how do you know it?"

Chris Pearson's suggested interview question for prospective teachers in his *Ed in the Apple* blog, spotted in *EducationNews.org*, May 17, 2010:
http://mets2006.wordpress.com/2010/05/17/a-reflective-school-system-can-the-proposed-new-teacher-evalaution-system-create-better-teachers-better-schools-and-a-collaborative-school-system/

"Defining teacher performance is not easy; measuring it is even harder. But failing to define teacher performance completely or rewarding only a narrow slice will ill serve students and teachers and will undermine public support."

Donald Gratz (see item #3)

"Bullying is that hidden animal that is hiding in the woods sometimes that you have to address. Kids are sneaky and passive-aggressive. A hidden nudge in a crowded cafeteria. A fry lobbed across the cafeteria."

Edward Boswell, middle-school principal in Plainfield, IL (in "Efforts to End Bullying, a Challenge to Leaders, Gain New Momentum" by Dakarai Aarons in *Education Week*, May 12, 2010 (Vol. 29, #31, p. 10), e-link for subscribers only http://www.edweek.org)

1. Carol Dweck on Helping Students Deal with Setbacks and Failure

In this *Chronicle Review* article, David Glenn reports on the work of Carol Dweck, a Stanford University research psychologist who has been trying for decades to shift people's mindsets from seeing intelligence as a "genetic blessing from the sky" to realizing that it's highly malleable. "[I]t's clear that if you have a fixed mindset and you're afraid that you might be failing," she says, "you're having all kinds of emotional reactions that could stand in your way."

In Dweck's view, praising children for their intelligence gets their self-worth too tied up in the idea that they are *smart*, which causes problems:

- Some become lazy because they believe that smarts will bail them out in a pinch;
- Some give up when they encounter setbacks because they fear that failing will prove they're not smart;
- Some tie themselves up in knots with perfectionism.
- Some figure the people who praise their intelligence are wrong and decide it's not worth working hard on schoolwork;

It's much better, Dweck believes, to praise children for effective effort and explicitly teach them that mental skills can improve by persistence and work. People perform better when they focus on things they can control, like effort, rather than things they can't control, like intelligence. "Hard working is what gets the job done," she says. "You just see that year after year. The students who thrive are not necessarily the ones who come in with perfect scores. It's the ones who love what they're doing and go at it vigorously."

Dweck has always been fascinated with how people cope with failure. She was particularly influenced by Martin Seligman's research on "learned helplessness," and conducted her own experiments with New Haven fifth graders. She gave children a psychological questionnaire– the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility Scale (http://www.eric.ed.gov:80/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/2f/a1/03.pdf) – which shows whether people attribute academic results to external factors (*The teacher had it in for me*, *The instructions weren't written clearly*) or their own actions (*I didn't study hard enough, I didn't read the instructions carefully*). She then asked children to solve block puzzles presented by two experimenters, one of whom always presented puzzles that were impossible. When this experimenter suddenly started presenting puzzles that *were* possible, some of the children still couldn't solve them. Sure enough, they were the children who had scored at the external-agency end of the spectrum on the questionnaire. Dweck's conclusion: children who

attribute responsibility for their academic performance to others are more vulnerable to learned helplessness.

What makes these children grow up with this fixed-intelligence mindset? Dweck believes it comes from hearing adults saying things like "Smart girl!" and "He's not very good at math" and absorbing the fixed-intelligence paradigm. Conversely, children who are praised for effort and tenacity are more likely to take on new challenges and persist in the face of setbacks. Dweck and her colleagues have developed a middle-school curriculum that explicitly teaches students that intelligence is incremental rather than fixed. She has done similar work with college students and, in both cases, seen improvements in students' academic achievement – most dramatically among African-American students.

Other psychologists have conducted similar experiments in universities and gotten less clear-cut results. It appears that mindsets are more ingrained for older students – and there's another variable: how invested students are in academic success. Those whose self-esteem is *too* tied up in doing well can fall into self-handicapping behaviors when they encounter frustration and failure, even if they have an incremental view of intelligence.

Dweck agrees. "We now have a much fuller understanding of the mediators of this entire process," she says. "We can really focus on all of the nodes of the process." These include:

- Believing that intelligence is malleable;
- Investment in academic success (not too strong);
- Setting realistic/stretch learning goals;
- Appropriate reactions to failures and setbacks;
- Dealing with stereotype threat (stigmatized groups picking up on societal rumors of inferiority);
- A sense of belonging in school.

"Carol Dweck's Mindset: It's Not About How Smart You Are" by David Glenn in *The Chronicle Review*, May 14, 2010 (Vol. LVI, #33, p. B6-B9), no e-link available; see Marshall Memos 319, 206, 188, 152, and 144 for other articles by Carol Dweck.

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2. Rethinking Teacher Compensation

In this *Kappan* article, Matthew Springer and Catherine Gardner of the National Center for Performance Incentives say that the single salary schedule, which is almost universal in public schools, is "riddled with inefficiencies." Paying teachers based on experience and academic credentials – neither of which is highly correlated with student achievement – makes little sense, they say. But what are the alternatives? These are the models currently vying for adoption:

- Career ladders – Paying teachers more as they step up to increasing levels of proficiency and responsibility;
- Knowledge- and skills-based pay – Giving salary increments for additional professional development coursework, completing a teaching portfolio, or earning National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification;

- Hard-to-staff recruitment or retention bonuses – Extra compensation based on location (usually high-poverty schools) and subject areas (mostly math, science, and special education) that are difficult to staff;
- Pay for performance (merit pay) – Financial incentives for individual teachers, groups of teachers, or whole schools based on student test scores, value added to student achievement, graduation rates, dropout reduction, student attendance, classroom observations, or portfolio completion.

Earlier research was critical of merit pay, pointing to failed experiments where tests were not vertically aligned and teachers competed against each other for a fixed pot of bonus money. But recent attempts have addressed some of these concerns, including Denver's ProComp program, Austin's REACH, and Nashville's Project on Incentives in Teaching.

However, the jury is still out on results. Springer and Gardner list five U.S. and six international studies: two showed no effect, five showed modest gains, and four are still in progress. So far, none of the key questions have been answered definitively: Should individual teachers or teacher teams be compensated? Should test scores or other input or outcome measures be used? If test scores are used, how should teachers in non-tested grades and subjects be evaluated? If multiple measures are used, how should they be weighted? How should variables like student mobility be factored in?

"Teacher pay alone will not improve the quality of teaching and, by extension, improve levels of student learning," conclude Springer and Gardner. "Compensation reform is just one element to be implemented alongside reforms that retool resource allocation and deployment norms; teacher hiring, tenure, and dismissal practices; and the standards and assessment systems, among other areas."

"Teacher Pay for Performance: Context, Status, and Direction" by Matthew Springer and Catherine Gardner in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2010 (Vol. 91, #8, p. 8-15), http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/index.htm

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3. Myths and Hopes About Merit Pay

"Defining teacher performance is not easy; measuring it is even harder," says Curry College professor Donald Gratz in this *Kappan* article. "But failing to define teacher performance completely or rewarding only a narrow slice will ill serve students and teachers and will undermine public support."

Gratz points to the many problems with using just test scores to evaluate educators (fewer than half of teachers work in grades and subjects with standardized tests; most testing programs cover only reading and math; important areas are not covered, including critical thinking, teamwork, and creativity; and test preparation can undermine broader education progress) and says, "At best, over-reliance on standardized tests provides a limited description of any student's ability; at worst, it corrupts the educational process."

What's the alternative? Gratz says the best place for a school to start is defining what student success looks like – what kind of student we ideally want to graduate in terms of

academic proficiency, values, ability to work with others, aesthetics, etc. "Not all goals are quantifiable," he says, "but no important goal should be ignored."

Should student results be used to decide teachers' compensation? U.S. policy makers seem to believe that poor teaching causes low student test scores and the way to improve teaching is financial incentives. Several assumptions underlie this view:

- Many teachers aren't trying hard enough because they're not motivated.
- These teachers know what to do, but they don't because they lack a financial incentive.
- Financial incentives are more important to teachers than student success.

"These are unlikely conclusions," says Gratz. "While teachers want to be paid professionally, the evidence suggests that they aren't motivated primarily by financial rewards. If they were, why would they enter teaching?"

Gratz says that in other fields, monetary rewards have not proven to be effective workplace motivators. Studies have shown that people respond more readily to other factors: approval, trust, respect from colleagues, high expectations, loyalty, job enrichment, good communication, a positive work environment, the ability to use their skills to solve problems, and making a difference. "Contrary to popular belief," he says, "many businesses issue merit raises based on supervisor or peer evaluations, but few rely on quantitative measures alone. Most jobs are too complex and multifaceted to reduce solely to numbers."

Gratz believes that what's needed is a clear alignment between goals, an accurate diagnosis of the main problems and their causes, and well thought-out solutions – involving key stakeholders every step of the way. He sees some hope in the emergence of voluntary national learning standards and believes that a more balanced view of student success will emerge, followed by a clear-headed look at how educators contribute to the bottom line and how differentiated compensation might be one of several components in achieving the ultimate goal.

"Looming Questions in Performance Pay" by Donald Gratz in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2010 (Vol. 91, #8, p. 16-21), http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/index.htm

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4. Five Questions About Merit Pay

In this *Kappan* article, James Madison University (VA) professors Chris Hulleman and Kenneth Barron say that there is virtually no helpful research on whether merit pay will improve teaching and learning. So they look at research from other fields, including psychology and business, to answer these questions:

• *Does merit pay improve performance?* Recent research has found that performance pay is effective in manufacturing but not service jobs, for simple but not complex tasks, and for increasing the quantity but not the quality of employee performance. Teaching is a highly complex professional job, which suggests that merit pay would not be effective at improving performance.

• *Does merit pay boost teacher motivation?* There has been lots of research on how extrinsic rewards undermine intrinsic motivation, but Hulleman and Barron believe that it doesn't apply to teaching. Professionals expect to be paid for their work, and receiving a reward signifies laudable performance, which can increase confidence and intrinsic motivation, infusing job-related tasks with extra meaning and value.

• *Do performance pay systems have adverse side effects?* Merit pay can lead teachers to neglect quality (higher-order skills) for quantity (test scores) and focus on test prep rather than the whole child. Merit pay based solely on test scores can also lead to gaming the system, discouraging low-achieving students from coming to school on testing days, and outright cheating. A broader definition of student success is key to avoiding these problems.

• *Aren't teachers already working as hard as they can?* In many cases that's true, but merit pay might get teachers using more effective classroom strategies – working smarter, not harder. The key is feedback on what's working and what isn't working. "When designed correctly," say Hulleman and Barron, "performance pay reinforces behaviors that make teachers better practitioners. Using rewards this way can increase the meaning and value of engaging in best teaching practices, which can increase intrinsic motivation."

• *Isn't merit pay widely used in business?* It turns out that only 6 percent of employees in the corporate world are involved in on-going performance pay systems, and only about 6 percent of overall earnings come from performance pay, mostly in finance and real estate. Most teachers are motivated by mission and service and don't think about their work the same way a salesperson or investment banker does. "Enticing people into teaching who are primarily motivated by money may change the climate of education in unhealthy ways," say Hulleman and Barron. But they reiterate that, "in the work world, money and motivation are inevitably intertwined; even if we love what we do, money is one of the reasons we work… What is less clear is whether performance pay will have an energizing effect on teacher motivation and quality or a negative effect on the public-service ethos of education."

Where do we go from here? ask Hulleman and Barron. They close with three questions that require additional research and debate:

- What is the link between teacher behaviors and student outcomes? End-of-the-year test scores don't provide nearly enough information, say the authors. "Teachers need more direct, frequent, and meaningful feedback from observations that link teaching behaviors to student learning."
- What do effective teaching and successful student learning look like and which outcomes are most important?
- What is the impact of different compensation schemes on teachers' health and well-being? These are crucial to school climate and student success.

"Performance Pay and Teacher Motivation: Separating Myth from Reality" by Chris Hulleman and Kenneth Barron in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2010 (Vol. 91, #8, p. 27-31), http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/index.htm

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5. Merit Pay Ideas from Arkansas

In this *Kappan* article, University of Arkansas/Fayetteville professors Gary Ritter and Nathan Jensen draw on four years of research and their experience developing a merit pay plan for the eStem charter schools in Little Rock to conclude that "merit pay plans, carefully implemented, have the potential to lead to improved student performance." Here are the components they believe are essential to successful implementation:

• *Generate teacher, staff, and administrator support*. In the first meeting with the eStem charter school teachers, all the criticisms of merit pay were put on the table and school leaders sought input from all stakeholders, which they used to modify their original plan.

• *Develop rewards that motivate teachers in productive ways*. Bonuses need to be attainable (i.e., based on a reasonable amount of student growth), transparent (known to all and well explained), substantial (teachers in the Little Rock schools could earn up to $10,000 bonuses), and sustainable (the resources must be there to keep bonuses coming year after year).

• *Give teachers during-the-year data*. In the eStem schools, teachers give interim assessments four times a year, analyze results immediately, and continuously improve their teaching strategies. There are no surprises when it comes to calculating the merit pay bonus based on student learning gains.

• *Encourage collaboration*. This means not fostering divisiveness and unhealthy competition among teachers, which is what happens with fixed bonus plans based on relative rankings of teachers. If only the top 15 teachers can earn bonuses, teachers won't share good ideas. Bonuses should be based on each teacher's performance compared to individual performance goals – or on a teacher team's or the whole school's collective student learning gains. Every staff member, from principal to custodian, contributes to student learning and should have a stake in the bonus plan.

• *Use multiple measures*. The merit pay plan should include elements other than test scores, for example, administrators' observations of classroom performance and teachers' above-and-beyond work after school or on committees.

Here is how merit pay is calculated in the eStem charter schools: core subject teachers can earn bonuses up to $10,000, non-core teachers up to $6,000, and all other staff up to $1,000. Core teachers are rated on a 100-point scale:

- Individual classroom student achievement growth – 50 points
- Schoolwide student achievement growth (including Arkansas Assessments) – 35 points
- Classroom evaluations by the principal – 15 points

Points are added up and multiplied by 100, so if a teacher earns 70 points, his or her bonus would be $7,000.

"The Delicate Task of Developing an Attractive Merit Pay Plan for Teachers" by Gary Ritter and Nathan Jensen in *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 2010 (Vol. 91, #8, p. 32-37), http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/index.htm. The authors can be reached at garyr@uark.edu and njensen@uark.edu.

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6. Students Evaluating College Instructors – Implications for K-12?

In this *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, David Glenn reports on the ongoing debate in universities on whether students should fill out course evaluations each semester. Some contend that evaluations are little more than popularity contests, and that the process prevents teachers from trying new classroom techniques for fear of being dinged by students. Louisiana State professor Larry Crumbley, an outspoken skeptic, believes most students fill out evaluations haphazardly and dishonestly and the result is a dumbed-down curriculum and grade inflation. "The real stakeholders in higher education are employers, society, the people who hire our graduates," he says. "Students are the inventory… At General Motors, you don't ask the cars which factory workers are good at their jobs. You check the cars for defects, you ask the drivers, and that's how you know how the workers are doing."

But studies have shown that student assessments correctly identify the most important elements in courses, and if the forms are well designed and instructors show they listen to feedback, students fill them out honestly and thoughtfully and provide valuable insights on instruction. Most universities are committed to giving students evaluative input and are working on ways to fine-tune their course evaluations. Here are four approaches:

• *Custom questions* – This gives instructors a chance to tailor course evaluation to emphasize the objectives they consider most important – for example, factual knowledge in an anatomy course or analytic writing in a literature course. Instructors can also create open-ended questions – for example, asking students if enough time was spent on citation skills, online resources, and critically evaluating information sources. The IDEA Center at Kansas State University has been working since 1975 to spread customized questions and has reached 350 colleges with its model.

• *Assessing learning* – Another innovation is asking students how much they learned in each course – and which instructional elements helped the most – for example, the pace of instruction, class discussions, hands-on lab activities, teamwork, and lab reports. A few years ago, Elaine Seymour at the University of Colorado/Boulder joined with colleagues to develop the Student Assessment of their Learning Gains (SALG) and there are now more than 900 templates on its website – http://www.salgsite.org/.

• *Questions on quality teaching* – Some colleges have included questions on teaching practices known to improve student learning – for example, activating prior knowledge and getting students to apply what they learn in novel situations. Including questions like these gives instructors feedback that can improve pedagogy. Generic questions like these are important; some university officials worry that without them (and if student evaluations are high-stakes for instructors' job and pay), instructors will include questions that make them look good.

• *Minimizing bias* – When Texas recently moved toward mandating that all public university course evaluations be posted on a website, universities scrambled to make sure that evaluations were comparable across courses and departments and courses. They also eliminated questions that students had no way of accurately assessing – for example, whether the textbook was the best possible choice for the course.

"Making decisions about the ability of someone to cultivate someone else's learning is inherently a messy process," says Ken Bain, a Montclair State University administrator and author of *What the Best College Teachers Do* (Harvard University Press, 2004). "It can't be reduced to a formula." He and others agree that student evaluations should be one of several tools used to evaluate – and improve – classroom teaching. Other sources of data include classroom visits by administrators and peers and teaching portfolios.

"Rating Your Professors: Scholars Test Improved Course Evaluations" by David Glenn in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 30, 2010 (Vol. LVI, #33, p. A1, A8, A9), no e-link available

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7. Guiding Principles for Elementary Literacy Coaches

In this helpful article in *The Reading Teacher*, literacy experts Susan L'Allier, Laurie Elish-Piper, and Rita Bean present seven research- and experience-based suggestions for literacy coaching in the elementary grades:

• *Coaches must know their stuff*. Everything a literacy coach does must build on a solid knowledge of literacy processes, acquisition, assessment, and instruction. Coaches also need to know how to work with adult learners, from rookies to veterans, as they make large-group presentations, facilitate small-group and grade-level team meetings, and support individual teachers with instruction and assessment.

• *The focus of coaching is working with teachers*. Coaches' time is divided among four areas: teacher-oriented, student-oriented, data-oriented (analyzing assessment information with teachers), and managerial (e.g., scheduling and organizing book rooms). The heart of coaches' work is observing, modeling, conferencing, co-teaching, and leading book study groups. This is what research says has the biggest impact on student learning.

• *Collaborative relationships are essential*. This includes building trust (by respecting teachers' expertise and following through on commitments); maintaining confidentiality (a firewall on what gets communicated to the principal); and communicating effectively with teachers. "[W]hen coaches focus their discussions on how to address the needs of students – rather than on the strengths and weaknesses of a teacher's instruction – they clearly communicate their intention to be a collaborator with the teacher, not an evaluator," say L'Allier, Elish-Piper, and Bean. "[E]xperienced coaches' conversations with teachers include more paraphrasing of teacher concerns and comments, more open-ended questions, and more respect for teachers' opinions, indicating that experienced coaches use their language to build collaborative relationships with teachers."

• *Successful coaches focus on a few core activities*. It's easy to fritter away time on activities that are urgent but not important. The key activities, according to the research, are discussing assessment results with teachers, observing instruction and giving supportive feedback, conferencing with teachers about teaching and learning, and modeling instruction.

• *Coaching must be both intentional and opportunistic*. "In every situation," say the authors, "the coach must have a plan for working with teachers that is deliberate but flexible…

At the same time, effective and efficient coaches take advantage of opportunities. They are available and accessible. They chat with teachers in the hallways, stop in classrooms, and visit the teachers' lounge to say 'hello' or to talk briefly with teachers. They have an open-door policy not only for classroom teachers but also for others such as librarians, special educators, and administrators. Most of these encounters are short and spontaneous. They often lead to more intense interactions that can then become intentional."

• *Coaches must be literacy leaders in the school*. They set goals (specific student achievement targets), develop people (one-on-one, in teacher teams, and in study groups), and redesign the organization to help accomplish the goals (scheduling literacy blocks, planning the most effective use of paraprofessionals, sharing important information from the district, state, and researchers, and reaching out to parents).

• *Coaching evolves over time*. Some coaches have lots of teaching and collaborative experience, others have very little. The key for both is being a continuous learner – keeping an open mind and proceeding as the way opens. The trend should always be on coaches spending more time in classrooms, providing direct support to teachers, and keeping everyone focused on student achievement.

"What Matters for Elementary Literacy Coaching? Guiding Principles for Instructional Improvement and Student Achievement" by Susan L'Allier, Laurie Elish-Piper, and Rita Bean in *The Reading Teacher*, April 2010 (Vol. 63, #7, p. 544-554), no e-link available; the authors can be reached at slallier@niu.edu, laurieep@niu.edu, and ritabean@pitt.edu.

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8. Coaching Makes a Difference

In this *Education Week* article, Debra Viadero reports on a four-year study (presented by Anthony Bryk, Gina Biancarosa, and Stanford University colleagues at AERA's conference on May 1st and due out in an *Elementary School Journal* article later this year) that linked effective classroom coaching of teachers to student gains in reading proficiency. The study, which examined the work of Literacy Collaborative coaches in K-2 classrooms in 17 East-coast schools, found that the strongest gains in reading skills (32 percent more than predicted over three years) were in classrooms whose teachers had the most coaching and implemented the program with the greatest fidelity.

"Coaching of Teachers Linked to Stronger Gains in Reading" by Debra Viadero in *Education Week*, May 12, 2010 (Vol. 29, #31, p. 6-7), e-link for subscribers only: http://www.edweek.org

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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.marshall8@verizon.net

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 37 years' experience as a teacher, principal, central office administrator, and writer, lightens the load of busy educators by serving as their "designated reader."

To produce the Marshall Memo, Kim subscribes to 44 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through more than a hundred articles each week, and selects 5-10 that have the greatest potential to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. He then writes a brief summary of each article, pulls out several striking quotes, provides e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the Memo to subscribers every Monday evening (with occasional breaks; there are about 50 issues a year).

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Publications covered

Those read this week are underlined.

American Educator
American Journal of Education
American School Board Journal
ASCD, CEC SmartBriefs, Daily EdNews
Catalyst Chicago
Ed. Magazine
EDge
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher (TESOL)
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
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Journal of Staff Development
Language Learner (NABE)
Middle Ground
Middle School Journal
New York Times
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal
Principal Leadership
Principal's Research Review
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
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Review of Educational Research
Teachers College Record
The Atlantic Monthly
The Chronicle of Higher Education
The Language Educator
The Learning Principal
The New Yorker
The Reading Teacher
Theory Into Practice
Tools for Schools