

Marshall Memo 551

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
September 8, 2014

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Quotes of the Week

“We need leaders, both in organizations and in schools, who create an atmosphere in which people have a sufficient degree of freedom; can move toward mastery on something that matters; and know *why* they're doing something, not just how to do it.”

Daniel Pink (see item #2)

“If you truly want to engage kids, you have to pull back on control and create the conditions in which they can tap into their own inner motivations.”

Daniel Pink (*ibid.*)

“Students have an appetite for discovery when the topic matters to them. When writing projects have an authentic reader beyond the classroom teacher, students see a direct connection between their lives and their literacy development.”

Donna Miller in “Intellectual Nutrition for the Snack Food Junkie,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 2014 (Vol. 96, #1, p. 59-63), www.kappanmagazine.org

“The humble question is an indispensable tool, the spade that helps us dig for truth, or the flashlight that illuminates surrounding darkness. Questioning helps us learn, explore the unknown, and adapt to change.”

Warren Berger (see item #3)

“Anyone with a Twitter account or a mean streak can try to parachute into your psyche.”

Stephanie Rosenbloom (see item #8)

“Librarians have got to change.”

Dian Schaffhauser (see item #7)

1. David Brooks on Six Virtues of the Mind

In this *New York Times* column, David Brooks suggests a set of “cerebral virtues” important to those involved in knowledge work, and invites us to grade ourselves on them:

- *Love of learning* – It’s important to be “ardently curious” about the world, he says.
- *Courage* – This includes being willing to hold unpopular views, to look at information that doesn’t fit one’s preconceptions, and knowing when to be daring and when to be cautious.
- *Firmness* – “The firm believer can build a steady worldview on solid timbers but still delight in new information,” says Brooks. “Firmness is a quality of mental agility.”
- *Humility* – This is “not letting your own desire for status get in the way of accuracy,” he says. “The humble person fights against vanity and self-importance... Such a person is open to learning from anyone at any stage of life.”
- *Autonomy* – Brooks is looking for the happy mid-point between uncritically glomming onto new ideas and stubbornly resisting them: “Autonomy is the median of knowing when to bow to authority and when not to, when to follow a role model and when not to, when to adhere to tradition and when not to.”
- *Generosity* – “This virtue starts with the willingness to share knowledge and give others credit,” says Brooks. “But it also means hearing others as they would like to be heard, looking for what each person has to teach and not looking to triumphantly pounce upon their errors.”

“[T]hinking well,” Brooks concludes, “means pushing against the grain of our nature – against vanity, against laziness, against the desire for certainty, against the desire to avoid painful truths. Good thinking isn’t just adopting the right technique. It’s a moral enterprise and requires good character, the ability to go against our lesser impulses for the sake of our higher ones.”

“The Mental Virtues” by David Brooks in *The New York Times*, August 29, 2014, <http://nyti.ms/1oYuZ8K>

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2. Daniel Pink on What Makes Students Want to Learn

(Originally titled “Motivated to Learn: A Conversation with Daniel Pink”)

In this *Educational Leadership* interview, Amy Azzam asks author Daniel Pink about motivation. Here are some highlights:

- *Rewards* – Pink says “if-then” motivators (If you do this, then you get that) are effective only with simple, short-term tasks like stuffing envelopes or turning a screw on an

assembly line. They are far less effective for complex, creative tasks that more people are doing in the 21st century – for example, designing software or inventing a new product. “The problem we have in schools and organizations,” says Pink, “is that we tend to use those if-then rewards for *everything* rather than for the areas in which they work.” In schools, learning goals (*I want to master algebra*) are far more effective than performance goals (*I want to get an A in algebra*). Students focused on learning goals are more likely to retain what’s learned, persist when they encounter difficulty, and understand the subject’s importance.

- *Engagement* – “There’s a huge difference between compliant behavior and engaged behavior,” says Pink. “With engagement, you’re doing something because you truly want to do it, because you see the virtues of doing it.” Compliant students may be easier to manage but they’re no fun to teach. To get them engaged, we have to find the right amount of autonomy over what, where, how, and with whom students learn. “We need leaders,” says Pink, “both in organizations and in schools, who create an atmosphere in which people have a sufficient degree of freedom; can move toward mastery on something that matters; and know *why* they’re doing something, not just how to do it.... Let’s trust people with autonomy instead of assuming they can’t handle it.” High-stakes tests are too much at the compliance end of the spectrum, he believes.

- *Challenge* – Teachers should aim for the sweet spot between too hard and too easy. When students are in this zone, learning and “flow” are optimized. The problem is that one student’s Goldilocks level is different from another’s, creating a customization challenge for teachers. To be successful, they need smaller classes, more planning time, and better resources.

- *Play and mastery* – “Rigor and playfulness pair much more smoothly than we think they do,” says Pink, “and that pairing can have some pretty spectacular results.” He points to some major discoveries that were made when scientists were zany experimenting.

- *Purpose* – Most teachers go into education for idealistic reasons but then stop talking about their ideals. “Teachers need to bring that sense of purpose to the surface,” says Pink. “They should talk more about why they went into teaching, why it matters, why they’re making this contribution to the world. This idea of purpose as motivator is not a touchy-feely sentiment. A pile of evidence during the last 10 years shows it can be a real performance enhancer.” The same is true for students – knowing *why* they are learning something greatly enhances performance. But we need something more than “because it’s on the test.” Teachers need to come up with good reasons, and students should play a part. “I’d like for kids to hold adults’ feet to the fire,” he says, “and insist they explain, ‘*Why* are we doing this stuff?’”

- *Two questions* – If a student is reluctant to do his homework, Pink suggests asking, “On a scale of one to ten, how ready are you to do your homework?” If the boy responds, “Two,” you ask, “Why didn’t you choose a lower number?” This approach often gets students talking about their own reasons for persisting. “When people have their own reasons for doing something,” says Pink, “they believe the reasons more deeply and adhere to the behavior more strongly... This questioning style – rather than the hectoring, demanding, commanding style we often default to – can be very effective.”

“As parents, as teachers, as entire organizations,” Pink concludes, “our instinct is toward greater control. We think control is going to make something better. But people have only two reactions to control: They comply, or they defy. We don’t want defiant kids, but we also don’t want compliant kids. We want kids who are engaged. If you truly want to engage kids, you have to pull back on control and create the conditions in which they can tap into their own inner motivations.”

“Motivated to Learn: A Conversation with Daniel Pink” by Amy Azzam in *Educational Leadership*, September 2014 (Vol. 72, #1, p. 12-17), <http://bit.ly/1n8qyIE>; Azzam can be reached at aazzam@ascd.org.

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3. Creating Lifelong Questioners

“The humble question is an indispensable tool,” says author Warren Berger in this *Edutopia* article, “the spade that helps us dig for truth, or the flashlight that illuminates surrounding darkness. Questioning helps us learn, explore the unknown, and adapt to change.” And yet schools don’t value questions as much as they should, says Berger; the premium seems to be on answers. Here are his suggestions for increasing questioning in the classroom:

- *Make it safe.* Students shouldn’t feel that asking a question shows ignorance or a lack of competence. They need a classroom climate where questioning is welcomed and seen as a strength and students constantly build their “questioning muscles.” One second-grade teacher has her students do “10 by 10” exercises, generating ten great questions on a topic in ten minutes with no obligation to answer them. Berger suggests The Right Question Institute as a resource – <http://rightquestion.org>.

- *Make it cool.* Some students think it’s cool to already know – or not care about knowing. Teachers need to point out that inventors, musicians, artists, and movie-makers are often mavericks who break new ground by asking provocative questions. This website can be a resource: <http://amorebeautifulquestion.com>.

- *Make it fun.* “There are countless ways to inject a ‘game’ element into questioning,” says Berger – the 10 by 10 exercise; asking *Why?* five times; asking *Why, What If, How?* with any problem; turning an answer into a question; opening closed questions; closing open questions; and more.

- *Make it rewarding.* “A great question can be the basis of an ongoing project, a report, an original creation of some kind,” says Berger. “The point is to show that if one is willing to spend time on a question – to not just Google it but grapple with it, share it with others, and build on it – that question can ultimately lead to something rewarding and worthwhile.”

- *Make it stick.* The goal should be to get students in a questioning groove, reflecting on how they use questions, reflecting on what they’ve learned, creating a new neural pathway. The best questioners look at familiar things in fresh ways (“vujá de”); are always on the lookout for assumptions that should be questioned; and ask questions that others might consider naïve.

“Five Ways to Help Your Students Become Better Questioners” by Warren Berger in *Edutopia*, August 18, 2014, <http://bit.ly/ZeNZdU>

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4. Baltimore’s Performance Pay System

In this *Education Week* article, Stephen Sawchuk reports on Baltimore’s innovative teacher compensation plan, which emphasizes professional accomplishments over credentials and seniority. After four years of development and two rounds of contract talks, here’s how the system works. Teachers get incremental pay increases each time they earn 12 “achievement units,” which must have a demonstrable impact on student learning. Teachers can earn 1-3 achievement units by:

- Attending professional development;
- Contributing to student learning (e.g., running after-school programs);
- Contributing to district efforts (e.g., writing curriculum);
- Contributing to colleagues (e.g., mentoring or coaching).

Teachers can earn 3-12 achievement units by getting a supervisor’s evaluation score of Developing or higher. Teachers can move through four levels:

- *Standard* – 5 intervals - \$47,950 - \$53,967
- *Professional* – 15 intervals - \$59,904 - \$84,851 – Teachers can advance to this level by moving through the five Standard levels or completing a mentoring program and a capstone project
- *Model* – 5 intervals - \$87,483 - \$93,634 – To advance to this level, teachers must submit a portfolio showing their teaching skill and evidence of student progress. In the six rounds of review so far, between 29 and 50 percent of each cohort has been advanced by the review team (which includes teachers).
- *Lead* – 5 intervals - \$95,253 - \$101,814 – To advance to this level, candidates must submit letters of recommendation from their principal and colleagues, be interviewed by a peer-review panel, and successfully complete a performance task.

Model and Lead status must be renewed every five years.

“I think this pathway really changed the mindset of the teaching force,” said Rhea Espedido, a young teacher who is making close to six-figures based on her work in literacy and mentoring of colleagues. “It’s really all about making yourself better, and then you get rewarded. I felt so good that people think about recognizing what we do, and are thanking us.” The big unanswered questions in Baltimore are whether the new system will have a positive impact on the recruitment and retention of highly effective teachers – and on quality of teaching and learning.

“Baltimore’s Pay Experiment Gains Foothold” by Stephen Sawchuk in *Education Week*, August 27, 2014 (Vol. 34, #2, p. 1, 14-15), www.edweek.org

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5. Boosting Test Scores Without Boosting an Important Kind of Intelligence

In this article in *Education Next*, Martin West (Harvard Graduate School of Education), Christopher Gabrieli (HGSE and the National Center on Time and Learning), Matthew Kraft (Brown University), and Amy Finn and John Gabrieli (M.I.T.) report on their study of 32 Boston schools enrolling eighth graders – 22 regular district schools, two exam schools, and eight charter schools (five of which were oversubscribed). Their research focused on the impact of schools on two types of cognitive ability:

- Crystallized knowledge – this is assessed by most standardized tests and includes factual knowledge, vocabulary, and math skills;
- Fluid cognitive skills – thinking and reasoning skills, processing speed, working memory, and solving novel problems.

These two types of mental ability are highly correlated – people with strong fluid cognitive skills tend to do well at accumulating crystallized knowledge. However, the two start to diverge when people reach their twenties, with fluid skills declining and crystallized knowledge continuing to grow into people’s seventies.

What did the researchers find? That although the oversubscribed charter schools and three district schools got the biggest gains in state test scores, their students didn’t make commensurate gains in fluid cognitive skills. These schools were successful at boosting students’ crystallized knowledge, which translated into significantly higher scores on the MCAS (the state accountability test), but they were much less successful at improving the other domain. Put another way, the most successful schools got students to do better at crystallized knowledge than would have been predicted by their fluid cognitive skills.

The researchers leave us with several important questions: Will deficits in fluid cognitive skills come back to haunt students down the road – for example, having difficulty in college? How malleable are fluid cognitive skills? Do we know how to teach them in schools? And what explains the fact that students in the two Boston exam schools were higher in fluid skills (far higher in one of them) than students in district and charter schools?

“This is a perfect time,” the authors conclude, “for cognitive psychologists, educators, and perhaps even game and software developers to join forces in rapid-cycle experimentation to explore whether and how schools can broadly and permanently raise students’ fluid cognitive skills.”

“What Effective Schools Do: Stretching the Cognitive Limits on Achievement” by Martin West, Christopher Gabrieli, Matthew Kraft, Amy Finn, and John Gabrieli in *Education Next*, Fall 2014 (Vol. 14, #4, p. 72-79), based on an article in *Psychological Science*, March 2014; <http://educationnext.org/what-effective-schools-do-cognitive-achievement/>

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6. Differences in Girls’ and Boys’ Classroom Preferences

In this *Kappan* article, Charlotte Jacobs, Peter Kuriloff, Shannon Andrus, and Amanda Cox (University of Pennsylvania) explore the teaching practices that are effective and engaging for girls in grades 6-12. Paralleling a similar study on what works for boys, the authors asked

1,328 students and 560 teachers in 14 all-girls schools across the U.S. to describe classroom experiences that were particularly memorable, interesting, engaging, or motivating. The schools represented a mix of philosophical, religious, and socioeconomic types.

Girls said they liked lessons that were clear, relevant to their lives, and gave them a chance to collaborate. They also appreciated activities that were hands-on, multimodal, and included discussion, creativity, and out-of-class experiences.

How did this differ from boys' classroom preferences? The parallel study on boys in single-sex schools (Reichert and Hawley, 2010) found that male students were directly instrumental in shaping how their teachers taught. Boys did this by displaying disengagement when teachers did things they didn't like, prompting teachers to change their practices to get boys involved.

Girls and their teachers were in "remarkable alignment" on classroom practices, say the authors. "The characteristics and elements of effective lessons that girls described were echoed, sometimes almost verbatim, by their teachers... This suggests that girls, like boys, elicit the pedagogy they need, though perhaps without (overtly) displaying resistance to the degree that boys do, and that male and female teachers of girls are especially attuned to what girls need in terms of pedagogy and activities that maximize girls' engagement."

Here are the main findings of the authors' study:

- *Boys are relational learners with teachers, girls with both teachers and peers.*

Reichert and Hawley found that "Establishing an affective relationship is a precondition to successful teaching for boys." Jacobs and her colleagues found that girls valued relationships with their teachers – individual conferences, help sessions, and emotional support – but also thrived on connection, bonding, and collaboration with female classmates.

- *Girls' relational learning extends beyond their teachers.* Much more than boys, girls cited debates, performances, class trips, and other collaborative activities as important to mastering concepts, getting to know themselves, and achieving deeper learning.

- *Boys thrive on transitivity, girls on relevance.* Reichert and Hawley found that boys were most engaged with classroom experiences that aroused and held their experiences – for example, learning the intricacies of swordplay when studying "Romeo and Juliet." Girls, on the other hand, were most engaged by classroom content that was relevant to their lives – for example, a girl said she loved her anthropology class because it helped her become more tolerant of women whose clothing covers their whole bodies, who enter into an arranged marriage, and who hold different religious beliefs. "Courses and lessons that are relevant to girls' lives have the power to engage them beyond the classroom and prepare them with the skills and perspective needed to navigate through our larger society," conclude Jacobs, Kuriloff, Andrus, and Cox.

"Reaching Girls" by Charlotte Jacobs, Peter Kuriloff, Shannon Andrus, and Amanda Cox in *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 2014 (Vol. 96, #1, p. 68-73), www.kappanmagazine.org

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7. How a School Library Can Become a Hub of Ideas and Resources

“Librarians have got to change,” says Dian Schaffhauser in this *T.H.E. Journal* article. School librarians won’t survive cutbacks if they can be characterized as “bookish” bureaucrats whose major focus is getting overdue books back and charging fines. Librarians have to be front and center maximizing the learning in their schools, says Schaffhauser. One way to do this is a Virtual Learning Commons (VLC) that “turns the traditional library page on a school website from a one-way stream of stale information into a lively and participatory digital space for students and teachers.” A good VLC is flexible, accessible 24/7, extends the classroom, and becomes central to teaching and learning by making available assignments and projects, samples of excellent work, book reviews, school updates, photos, and reference material.

The VLC model created by David Loertscher and Carol Koechlin has five basic “rooms”:

- The main page – This is an information center with databases, staff photos and contact information, and a calendar of events; it might also have a slide show or student-made videos.
- School culture – a “living school yearbook” featuring band performances, choirs, football news, and students who have won awards.
- Literacy – A center to celebrate reading and content creation – book and movie reviews by students, teachers, and librarians, reading list “likes,” writing contests, poetry readings, and book club outreach.
- Knowledge-building – People come together to collaborate and co-teach on learning projects and curriculum units, providing resources for students, teachers, and parents.
- Experimental learning center – This area focuses on school improvement and might have a virtual teachers’ lounge with projects, opportunities, and announcements, links to standards, PD resources, or major documents, and updates from colleagues and administrators.

In a sidebar in the article, Schaffhauser has five tips for creating a robust VLC: (a) Checking out criteria from the American Association of School Librarians; (b) Understanding that a VLC is constantly evolving and adapting to the needs of staff and students; (c) Getting in on the ground floor on curriculum planning, especially Common Core resources; (d) Teaching users “to fish” versus being a “fish market” for them – teachers and students need to have the skills to find resources and not be dependent on the librarian; and (e) Reaching out for support and ideas, perhaps using Twitter and other social media.

“Will This Website Save Your Library (and Your Librarians)?” by Dian Schaffhauser in *T.H.E. Journal*, November 2013, <http://online.qmags.com/TJL1113> (spotted in *Education Digest*, September 2014 (Vol. 80, #1, p. 37-43)

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8. Why We Focus on the Negative, and What We Can Do About That

“Anyone with a Twitter account or a mean streak can try to parachute into your psyche,” says Stephanie Rosenbloom in this *New York Times* article. “Just as our attention naturally gravitates to loud noises and motion, our minds glom on to negative feedback.”

There is a solution: proactively managing this involuntary tendency. One strategy is to ask whether a critical barb has an element of truth. Why does it bother us? Does it trigger an insecurity? Then turn it into a learning experience.

Another strategy is to consider a critic’s motivation. “In the virtual realm, factors including anonymity, invisibility, and lack of authority allow disinhibition to flourish,” says Rosenbloom. Some people see the Internet as a place for games exempt from everyday rules and norms. The result can be rude criticism, anger, hatred, and threats. Understanding the context can give us perspective: we can ignore or disconnect.

Another approach is to internally dispute a hateful comment. If someone says, “You’re an idiot and no one likes you,” you can rebut it like a defense attorney: you have a job, a good life, and lots of friends.

It’s wise, says Rosenbloom, to avoid going into hazardous online waters when we’re in a neutral or down frame of mind; at such times, we are more vulnerable to negativity. A good way to stop ourselves from dwelling on the negative is to get fully engaged in something, achieving the “flow” state – playing a piano concerto, practicing karate, writing code, being immersed in a conversation with a friend.

Humor is another antidote to negativity. James Pawelski of the University of Pennsylvania says bars should have “professor happy hours” when teachers bring their student evaluations and pass around the worst ones. “Nobody should be alone when they’re reading these things,” he says. If you do find yourself alone brooding over negative comments, try reading them aloud in a goofy voice, Pawelski suggests. They’ll lose some of their bite.

“In the quest to quell the cruel, we often fail to savor the good,” concludes Rosenbloom. And there’s a lot of positive stuff out there. Focus on the positive and share those comments with friends. “Research shows that it takes more time for positive experiences to become lodged in our long-term memory, so it’s not just pleasurable to dwell on a compliment – it’s shrewd.”

“Dealing with Digital Cruelty” by Stephanie Rosenbloom in *The New York Times*, August 24, 2014, <http://nyti.ms/1uGnGqZ>

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9. Beginning-of-the-Year Questions for Parents

In this *Edutopia* article, Oakland, California leadership coach Elena Aguilar bemoans the fact that as a new teacher she didn’t use her opening conversations with parents better. Based on 20 years of subsequent experience and having a child of her own in school, she now recommends the following questions:

- What do you see as your child's greatest strengths and skills? Tell me about a time when you saw your child demonstrating those skills.
- Next June, what do you hope your child says about his/her experience in school this year? What's the story you hope to hear?
- What was your experience like in this grade? How do you remember that year of school?
- What are your fears or concerns about your child in this year of school?
- How and when would you like me to be in touch with you this year? What do you hope I'd communicate with you about?
- Is there anything else you can tell me about your child that you think would help me support his/her learning?
- Is there a question you hope I'll ask you about your child?

"7 Questions to Ask Parents at the Beginning of the Year" by Elena Aguilar in *Edutopia*, August 18, 2014, <http://bit.ly/1uGlq2O>

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10. Short Item:

Apps to call on students randomly – This *Educational Leadership* item suggests three apps to cold-call students:

- Pick Me! www.classeapps.com/pick-me generates student names and keeps track of who's called on.
- Class Cards <http://classcardsapp.com> lets the teacher quickly rate the quality of a student's response and can put the student on hold until he or she is ready to respond.
- ClassDojo www.classdojo.com lets the teacher establish several desired behaviors – for example, participating in classroom discussions, working effectively with teams, or persisting with challenging work – and give students instant feedback. Students can create avatars and monitor their progress.

"App-propos" in *Educational Leadership*, September 2014 (Vol. 72, #1, p. 10)

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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).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for a year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and how to pay by check, credit card, or purchase order.

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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
Ed. Magazine
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Week
Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
Educational Horizons
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Elementary School Journal
Essential Teacher
Go Teach
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
Independent School
Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk (JESPAR)
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