

# Marshall Memo 291

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education

June 22, 2009

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## Quotes of the Week

“The Internet is this generation’s defining technology for literacy.”

Lisa Zawilinski (see item #4)

“Great teachers live in a world of vision. They are able to envision in their students what others cannot see. Because they can see greatness in their students, they are able to build greatness in their students.”

Joan Richardson (see item #7)

“The issue of helping English learners become capable and engaged readers is certainly one of the greatest challenges facing urban educators today, largely because teachers feel, and are in fact, underprepared to teach these students.”

William Teale (see item #3)

“We all know that the quality of the teacher trumps all other in-school factors. The challenge is to help tens of thousands of teachers get better at what they do.”

Michael Fullan and Ben Levin (see item #1)

“Most school systems make the mistake of loading up on testing as the driver of reform. They install too many tests, too narrowly conceived, with punitive consequences – a recipe for failure.”

Michael Fullan and Ben Levin (*ibid.*)

“I get frustrated because I don’t know how to type very fast.”

A fifth grader on participating in his class’s online literacy discussion forum (see #5)

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## 1. A Canadian Province Goes for Whole-System Reform Using Six Principles

In this *Education Week* article, Canadian educators Michael Fullan and Ben Levin spell out the six principles that were used to drive a province-wide reform effort in Ontario, which has about 2 million students in 4,900 schools. Test scores in higher-order literacy and numeracy have increased 10 percentage points, the number of underperforming schools has been drastically reduced, the high-school graduation rate has improved from 68 to 77 percent, and staff morale and public confidence have improved. Here are Ontario's fundamentals:

- *Develop the entire teaching profession.* “We all know that the quality of the teacher trumps all other in-school factors,” say Fullan and Levin. “The challenge is to help tens of thousands of teachers get better at what they do.” The province decided not to use performance pay because it's unproven in the research, opting instead for incentives for intensive professional development toward a high standard of practice that's based on evidence of performance.

- *Focus on a small number of ambitious priorities.* Ontario decided on three – literacy, numeracy (incorporating higher-order skills and making connections to the rest of the curriculum), and high-school graduation. In each area, the province set measurable goals in partnership with schools and districts.

- *Create a two-way street between instruction and assessment.* “Most school systems make the mistake of loading up on testing as the driver of reform,” say Fullan and Levin. “They install too many tests, too narrowly conceived, with punitive consequences – a recipe for failure.” A better approach, they argue, is keeping instruction and assessment tightly aligned and in balance and constantly identifying and spreading instructional practices that are producing measurable results.

- *Foster effective leadership.* Articulating general standards is not enough, say the authors. The development of teacher leaders, building administrators, and system leaders needs to be wedded to the system priorities – in this case, literacy, numeracy, and high-school graduation – with the goal of changing the culture of the organization.

- *Intervene early.* This goes for helping struggling students and improving low-performing schools.

- *Focus money on these fundamentals.* “Otherwise, it will be squandered,” say Fullan and Levin. “Schools often seem to behave as if any new activity requires money. In fact, a main requirement is to use existing resources in a more focused manner.”

“The Fundamentals of Whole-System Reform: A Case Study from Canada” by Michael Fullan and Ben Levin in *Education Week*, June 17, 2009 (Vol. 28, #35, p. 30-31); this article can be purchased at <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2009/06/17/index.html>

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## **2. A High School Makes Good Use of Content-Area Tutoring**

In this intriguing *Kappan* article, Massachusetts educators Julie Joyal Mowschenson and Robert Weintraub describe Tutorial, an academic support program at Brookline High School, where Weintraub is headmaster. The program was designed to address four problems:

- When students with mild learning issues were placed in special education, they often felt stigmatized.
- Teachers and psychologists referred these students to special education because it was the only place they could get the extra support they needed.
- Special-education teachers provided generic help in study skills and learning strategies, but weren't addressing content-related problems in English, math, science, history, and world languages.
- Special-education services for these students were expensive.

Brookline High's Tutorial Program addressed these problems by assigning a small number of content-area teachers to work intensively with targeted students. Since the program began in 2002, it has allowed more than 100 students to withdraw from special education, given teachers a highly personalized venue for interacting with students, and won raves from staff and parents.

Here's how Tutorial works. Program leaders identify pairs of teachers, one from the humanities and one from math or science. Each pair of teachers is assigned 10 students for the year, with students' needs matched to teachers' strengths. Students meet with their Tutorial teachers once a day for 50 minutes and receive an academic credit for the course. Tutorial teachers preview their own academic work, reinforce work in other content areas, monitor their students' academic lives, check in with other teachers, and communicate with parents. They also help students set goals and focus on the content in each subject. If students needs help in a subject not represented on their team (e.g., foreign language), other teachers are available in the same time-block.

Tutorial was evaluated by a team from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and found to be effective in improving students' grades, test scores, and academic self-confidence. The program has also improved the work lives of participating teachers. Teaching only four classes a day rather than five and working closely with small numbers of students one period a day is a better deal than regular teaching. Tutorial allows teachers to develop closer relationships, communicate regularly with colleagues in other departments, and have a greater sense of efficacy. It's no accident, say the authors, that Brookline's teacher attrition rate is one third of the national rate. An additional benefit for the school is the reduction in special-education paperwork.

When it started, Tutorial served 40 students and was supported by a grant from the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Fund, a non-profit organization founded by alumni, parents, educators, and community philanthropists. The program now has 200 students (out of 1,800 at Brookline High) and is covered entirely by the regular school budget. How is this possible? Because the number of special-education students has dropped from 260 in 2002 to 160 today, allowing a shift of \$150,000 from the special-education budget to the regular-education budget to help support Tutorial's eight teachers, director, and research.

"The Tutorial Program is a legitimate and compelling alternative to special education for many students," conclude Mowschenson and Weintraub. "Researchers have validated our belief that students with mild learning issues benefit more from subject-based tutoring by regular-education teachers than from special instruction by certified special-education teachers... Schools across the country can implement similar programs with equal success."

"Beyond Special Education: A New Vision of Academic Support" by Julie Joyal Mowschenson and Robert Weintraub in *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 2009 (Vol. 90, #10, p. 751-755); this article can be purchased at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kappan.htm>  
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### **3. What We Know (and Don't Know) About Literacy Instruction for ELLs**

"The issue of helping English learners become capable and engaged readers is certainly one of the greatest challenges facing urban educators today," says University of Illinois/Chicago professor William Teale in this article in *The Reading Teacher*, "largely because teachers feel, and are in fact, underprepared to teach these students." Fortunately, he says, we are learning more and more about effective instructional approaches for English learners. Teale summarizes the latest research findings in three levels of certainty:

• *What we can bank on:*

- Instruction in students' native language helps them become proficient in English.
- Good literacy instruction for ELLs looks very much like good literacy instruction for their English-only peers. Key ingredients include:
  - Assessment and instruction linked on an ongoing basis;
  - Clear learning objectives that build across the year and across grade levels;
  - Consistent, well-designed instructional routines;
  - Robust opportunities for authentic practice in reading and writing;
  - Active student engagement.

Key areas of focus in literacy are:

- Comprehension
- Vocabulary
- Phonological awareness
- Phonics and word recognition
- Reading fluency
- Writing

- The trajectory of literacy development across the years is very similar for all students. (The article has an intriguing graph showing the different growth curves of students' articulation, syntax, phonological awareness, decoding, word recognition, vocabulary, and comprehension.)
- Certain instructional accommodations are especially helpful to English learners. These include:
  - Extended explanations with redundant information such as gestures, pictures, and other visual cues;
  - Extra attention to identifying and clarifying key and difficult vocabulary;
  - Texts that have a degree of content familiarity;
  - A focus on consolidating text knowledge by having the teacher, other students, and English learners themselves paraphrase and summarize;
  - Additional time and practice with reading and writing activities;
  - Extended linguistic interactions with peers and teacher;
  - Strategic use of students' primary language (where the teacher has knowledge of it).
- *What seems highly likely:*
  - Instruction compatible with English learners' interactional and discourse styles promotes greater student engagement and participation.
  - Involving English learners' families in their children's literacy education results in greater school success.
- *What we don't know very much about and needs more research:*
  - Does literacy instruction tailored to English learners' cultures enhance achievement?
  - What kinds of instructional accommodations are most helpful to students in different grades and at different reading levels?
  - What kinds of home support – and in what language – benefit students most as they move through the grades?

“Students Learning English and Their Literacy Instruction in Urban Schools” by William Teale in *The Reading Teacher*, May 2009 (Vol. 62, # 8, p. 699-703); this article can be purchased at <http://www.reading.org/Publish.aspx?page=/publications/journals/rt/current/index.html&mode=redirect>. Teale can be reached at [wteale@uic.edu](mailto:wteale@uic.edu).

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#### **4. Bridging the Gap Between Kids' Internet Savvy and In-School Literacy**

“The Internet is this generation's defining technology for literacy,” says University of Connecticut graduate student Lisa Zawilinski in this article in *The Reading Teacher*, and describes a fifth-grade teacher's steep learning curve when she first launches a classroom blog. Things go smoothly for the first couple of weeks, with students responding to the teacher's questions and prompts. But then student interest begins to wane, and it becomes evident that this is because the teacher's plodding approach doesn't match the highly interactive use of Web 2.0 to which students are accustomed. A student asks if she can post one of her poems.

Another student wants to post questions for classmates to answer. A third wants to write about a book other than the one the class is reading. The teacher regroups and reconfigures her class blog so all three students get their wish.

As the teacher explores the possibilities, she finds that there are four kinds of classroom blog:

- *Classroom news blog* – To share information with students and parents, including classroom news, homework assignments, and curriculum updates. Here’s one example from a fourth-grade class: <http://mskreul.edublogs.org>.
- *Mirror blogs* – Students or colleagues respond to an experience or a piece of reading. Here’s an example from a teacher – <http://calteacherblog.blogspot.com> - and from fourth-grade students – [http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger\\_id=119124](http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=119124).
- *Showcase blogs* – To post student art projects, audio clips, and writing. Here’s a first-grade class’s blog: [http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger\\_id=1337](http://classblogmeister.com/blog.php?blogger_id=1337).
- *Literature response blogs* – This transports the idea of the literature response journal onto the Net. An example from a fifth and sixth-grade class: <http://fwe2.motime.com>.

Zawilinski suggests the following steps to setting up a classroom blog:

- *Explore high-quality blogs*, for example, <http://edublogawards.com>.
- *Locate additional classroom blogs*, for example, by Googling blog, classroom, 5<sup>th</sup> grade.
- *Select a blog provider*, for example, <http://edublogs.org>, <http://www.21classes.com>, <http://www.epals.com/products/esb>, and <http://classblogmeister.com>. All of these are free.
- *Launch your blog*. This involves making decisions on password access for students, whether you will screen comments before they are posted, etc. Some of these options are explained at <http://edublogs.org/videos>.

How directive should a teacher be on a blog? Can’t Internet-savvy students figure out the skills they need on their own? No, this teacher decides, because, in the words of Howard Reingold, “This population is both self-guided and in need of guidance, and although a willingness to learn new media by point-and-click exploration might come naturally to today’s student cohort, there’s nothing innate about knowing how to apply their skills...” The teacher takes advantage of the authentic audience provided in the blog and sets about developing her students’ higher-order thinking skills. This involves integrating the following traditional reading comprehension skills into the new medium:

- *Bolster background*. Start by posting material on the blog that builds background knowledge about what students are studying. Students read online, evaluate what they’re reading, and react with online posts.

- *Prime the pump*. Ask students to use the blog to write about things that need clarification, comment on their first impressions of characters, summarize what’s been learned so far, and forge connections they can make to their own experience and knowledge. At this point, students should read each others’ comments on the blog.

- *Continue the conversation.* Have students work in pairs to synthesize what they have learned from their own writing and that of their classmates. Synthesizing is a higher-order skill and students need explicit instruction and then feedback on their efforts.
- *Make multiplicity explicit.* Have students read the classroom blog, think about the variety of comments it contains, and comment on it.

“HOT Blogging: A Framework for Blogging to Promote Higher Order Thinking” by Lisa Zawilinski in *The Reading Teacher*, May 2009 (Vol. 62, # 8, p. 650-661); this article can be purchased at <http://www.reading.org/Publish.aspx?page=/publications/journals/rt/current/index.html&mode=redirect>. Zawilinski can be reached at [lisa.zawilinski@uconn.edu](mailto:lisa.zawilinski@uconn.edu).

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## 5. Fifth Graders Read E-Books, Respond, and Chat Electronically

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Kansas State University/Manhattan professor Lotta Larson describes a veteran fifth-grade teacher’s experiment with having ten of her students read an e-book on laptop computers, respond in electronic journals, and discuss their book with each other using an online message board. Half of the students read *Bud, Not Buddy* and the other half read *The Watsons Go to Birmingham – 1963* (both by Christopher Paul Curtis). The pattern for the 15 class periods devoted to this project was for students to read and write in their e-journals for about 30 minutes and then spend 15-20 minutes on the message board. Students also tapped into the message board at other times during the school day.

Right from the start, students loved the format but wanted to be more actively involved in coming up with questions of their own, rather than depending solely on the teacher’s prompts. So the teacher conducted a mini-lesson on what constitutes a good prompt and showed students how to start a new “thread” to the discussion of their book on the message board, while still maintaining some control over content. Here’s what the student handout looked like:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Group # \_\_\_\_\_

1. Think about the part that you read today in your book.
  - What did you like?
  - What questions do you have?
  - What did this chapter make you feel or think about?
  - What would you have done if you were in a similar situation?
2. Write two quality prompts (new threads) that can be used to start a good discussion in your group. Your prompts should relate to the book.
3. You will post your BEST prompt on the Message Board. Your prompt must be approved by your teacher BEFORE you post.

Prompt 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Prompt 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Check your work:

\_\_ My prompt relates to the book.

\_\_ My prompts are open-ended and cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.”

\_\_ My prompts make my group members think about what they have read.

The teacher also laid down two rules for students’ online interchanges:

- *Talk about the book.* (Students had a tendency to get into chat mode.)
- *Use appropriate language* – but emoticons, abbreviations (U R so right), acronyms (OMG), capitalizations, and extra punctuation marks were okay because they fostered a conversational feel in students’ exchanges.

Statistical summaries generated by the message board’s software allowed the teacher to keep track of how often students posted comments. Most participated actively (an average of 47 posts, 42 replies, 5.5 new prompts, and 28 words per post), but the teacher noticed that one high-achieving student was doing very little communicating with his classmates and spoke to him. “I get frustrated because I don’t know how to type very fast,” he said, so the teacher gave him extra time to word-process his responses. From that point on, his frequency picked up noticeably.

Students clearly enjoyed discussing questions with their classmates. Here are some examples of posts:

- Bud was very brave to go on a 24 hour all day all night walk. Have you ever gone on a long run or walk and felt like collapsing? Where? How long?
- I am in shock about Joey. I’m biting my nails and just want 2 stop reading in case she dies, but I have 2 read more! This really happened in history.. How do u feel about this? Describe. Joey is so sweet and I couldn’t imagine the book without her. Plz don’t let her die.
- What do you think about the bomb? Does it have to do with racism? I mean the Watsons are black...
- Do you think Kenny’s parents have problems in their marriage because their mom didn’t even care about the new radio?

Was this classroom experiment effective? Larson and the teacher thought it was. In a traditional literacy classroom, says Larson, the teacher leads the class in conversation about a story, and knowledge is mostly transmitted. In this format, students participated far more actively, thought about the diverse opinions of their classmates, and took full advantage of the asynchronous nature of the message board. “In a traditional literature circle,” says Larson, “students who are shy, struggling as readers, or linguistically diverse may hesitate to share ideas in group settings.” As one student put it, “we can ask each other questions and answer one at a time.”

Larson suggest the following sources for materials and software:

- Free e-books: <http://www.getfreebooks.com>.
- E-books for sale: <http://www.ebooks.com> and <http://www.fictionwise.com>

• Online literature response: <http://moodle.org>, free course management system, <http://www.epals.com> for e-mail, blogging, and collaborative projects, and <http://www.pbwiki.com> for the Peanut Butter Wiki site, on which students can create a wiki to discuss books online.

“Reader Response Meets New Literacies: Empowering Readers in Online Learning Communities” by Lotta Larson in *The Reading Teacher*, May 2009 (Vol. 62, # 8, p. 638-648), this article can be purchased at <http://www.reading.org/Publish.aspx?page=/publications/journals/rt/current/index.html&mode=redirect>. Larson can be reached at [ell4444@ksu.edu](mailto:ell4444@ksu.edu).

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## 6. Using Joke Books to Improve a Student’s Prosody

In this article in *The Reading Teacher*, Fordham University professor Molly Ness describes how she tutored Emma, a nine-year-old student who had been having difficulty reading from the time she entered school. When Emma read, she was slow and labored, and she had great difficulty with *prosody*, the aspect of fluency that’s often neglected (the other two, automaticity and accuracy, have been getting most of the attention in classrooms). Good prosody means your reading sounds like speaking, conforming to the rhythms, cadences, and flow of oral language. These are its key aspects:

- Emphasizing appropriate words;
- Tone of voice rising and falling with the right intonation;
- Inflection matching punctuation (such as a rising tone at a question mark);
- Vocal tone reflecting characters’ emotions in dialogue;
- Appropriate pauses at phrase boundaries and punctuation.

Ness started by having Emma read and re-read familiar texts, including poetry and narrative passages. Using echo and choral reading, she encouraged Emma to pay attention to punctuation and read with the right expression. Nothing worked. Emma was disengaged and unmotivated and didn’t improve.

Then one day, Emma came to her tutorial with a joke book she’d purchased at the school’s book fair. When Ness asked her to read some of the jokes, Emma was her usual disfluent self. They discussed how popular comedians pace the delivery of a joke, stress certain words, and speak in a smooth, fluid manner. Ness saw “a ripe instructional opportunity” because Emma seemed to enjoy telling jokes and they are “the quintessential texts for oral delivery; they require that a reader attend to punctuation, intonation, and phrasing.” If the jokester doesn’t, even a good joke will fall flat. Without fanfare, Ness started using joke books with Emma. As they began their third lesson practicing jokes, the girl asked, “Do we get to do jokes again or do we have to read?” Now she was motivated to *practice* and improve her delivery – and it was fun! Here’s one of the jokes they used:

Doctor, Doctor, I feel like a strawberry.

Well, it sounds like you’re in a real jam.

Having identified the source of humor – the play on words between *strawberry* and *jam* – Ness asked Emma, “Knowing that the word *jam* is what makes this joke funny, how could you read this better?” And she modeled the right intonation, had Emma do guided and independent practice, and gave her feedback. A key was getting Emma to tune in to the meaning. Here’s another example:

Doctor, Doctor, my husband smells like a fish.

Poor sole!

Emma read without intonation until she realized the double meaning of soul/sole and improved her delivery.

From working with Emma, Ness formulated the following steps to using joke books effectively:

- Make a tape recording as the student reads the joke aloud for the first time, and take notes on word emphasis, timing, and expression.
- Have the student listen to the tape and identify areas for improvement.
- Discuss what makes the joke amusing and how delivery can make the joke work.
- Point out how question marks, commas, periods, and exclamation marks play a part in the joke’s meaning and humor.
- Model proficient delivery of the joke, and have the student comment on how it was delivered.
- Use choral and echo reading as the student re-reads the joke, pointing out word emphasis, intonation, and timing.
- Tape-record the student’s improved delivery of the joke and compare it to the initial delivery.
- Have the student tell or re-read jokes to partners, with students evaluating each other on their expression, timing, and word emphasis.
- Have students practice for several days for a “comedy hour” at which they perform their jokes for classmates and classroom visitors.

Emma made significant progress and after several months, she scored a 3 on the NAEP fluency scale. “Her growth from a disfluent reader to a fluent one was nothing to laugh at,” says Ness.

“Laughing Through Rereadings: Using Joke Books to Build Fluency” by Molly Ness in *The Reading Teacher*, May 2009 (Vol. 62, # 8, p. 691-694), this article can be purchased at <http://www.reading.org/Publish.aspx?page=/publications/journals/rt/current/index.html&mode=redirect>. Ness can be reached at [mness@fordham.edu](mailto:mness@fordham.edu).

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## **7. Using British Singer Susan Boyle as a Lesson on Expectations**

Joan Richardson, *Kappan*’s new editor, recommends that school leaders play the YouTube clip of Susan Boyle’s initial performance on *Britain’s Got Talent* – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lp0IWv8QZY> – at next fall’s beginning-of-the-year meeting. It’s a perfect example, she says, of how people can be fooled by outward appearances,

as so often happens with students who don't look like they can be high achievers. "Teachers short-circuit the learning process anytime they anticipate a poor outcome," says Richardson. "Great teachers live in a world of vision. They are able to envision in their students what others cannot see. Because they can see greatness in their students, they are able to build greatness in their students."

Martin Haberman says we have the power to transform students' lives, especially the lives of those who grow up in poverty. "If you believe it's a matter of life or death," says Haberman, "it changes everything you do."

"Looks Deceive" by Joan Richardson in *Phi Delta Kappan*, June 2009 (Vol. 90, #10, p. 698); this article can be purchased at <http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/kappan.htm>

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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](mailto: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).

## ***Subscriptions:***

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for the school year. Rates decline steeply for multiple readers within the same organization. See the website for these rates and information on paying by check or credit card.

## ***Website:***

If you go to <http://www.marshallmemo.com> you will find detailed information on:

- How to subscribe or renew
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- Publications (with a count of articles from each)
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- About Kim Marshall (including links to articles)
- A free sample issue

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- The current issue (in PDF or Word format)
- All back issues (also in PDF or Word)
- A database of all articles to date, searchable by topic, title, author, source, level, etc.
- How to change access e-mail or password

## ***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  
Changing Schools (McREL)  
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  
JESPAR  
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  
Rethinking Schools  
Review of Educational Research  
Teacher Magazine (online)  
Teachers College Record  
The Atlantic Monthly  
The Language Educator  
The New Yorker  
The Reading Teacher  
Theory Into Practice  
Tools for Schools/The Learning Principal