As I begin my tenth year at Marin Academy, I am reminded of the extraordinary energy I first encountered on campus when I interviewed for the Head of School position and the high regard in which the faculty and students held one another. In separate meetings, I posed the same question to them: why are you here? The students replied: “I’m here because of the faculty.” The response to the same question from the faculty: “I’m here because of the students.”

I can think of precious few schools where the relationship—and quality of engagement—between faculty and students is so highly prized as it is at MA. It is one of the key elements that drew me to this place and it continues to sustain me in my work on behalf of the school. This mutual commitment makes for MA’s dynamic teaching and learning environment—one which I am fortunate to be a part of as a fellow teacher.

Teaching is a profession that banks on constant rediscovery and believes in all possibilities. It’s never about any one thing, and it’s never about one thing all the time. Adhering to a Keatsian-like truth in imagination, teaching follows the “what-if” in the minds and hearts of literally a cast of thousands. With good teaching, the work is visionary. It has to be. The responsibility a teacher has from day one is about building for the future; the “bottom line,” usually manifests itself later.

As a teaching and learning community committed to scholarship and discovery, we seek to better understand a sometimes elusive element associated with excellence: the cultivation of an ethos of learning. Along with the intellectual and the social, there are the moral moorings to this job that allow for a certain tenderness to the day. It’s never just about thinking. It’s about exploring and affirming values—a shared privilege not commonly found in other professions.

I frequently ask students to share the best thing about their teachers, and their voices join mine in saluting this profession. “They care about the job they are doing,” one wrote. “They help you to experience, experiment and expand,” said another. “They chose this job because they want to be with us.” And finally, “they have the ability to have faith in teenagers.” Out of the mouths of babes.

I thank you, MA, for the inspiration!

Bodie Brizendine
Head of School
PETER POUTIATINE, a Marin Academy English teacher since 2000, began discussing the idea of a Center for Teaching and Learning at MA in the spring of 2003. As Peter embarked on this process, he quickly learned through his research that this need, seemingly clear in his mind, had never been implemented in any Bay Area high school, and he was unable to find a parallel resource in schools across the country. There was a strong consensus throughout his conversations with educators, administrators, and mentors that the need was evident, and while he would not be following another’s example, Peter would clear his own path. This vision has grown, and one hopes it will continue to develop, as this forward-thinking initiative and leadership works to leave a lasting impression on Marin Academy—an institution for all minds, students and teachers alike. Peter Poutiatine graduated from University of Colorado and went on to pursue his Masters of Education from Seattle University.

The Center for Teaching and Learning?” one of my students said to me recently. Squinting her eyes and looking at me askance, she regarded me with something like suspicion and mockery. “Isn’t that a little—” She hung fire for emphasis before over enunciating the final word in a gush of attitude, “—redundant?” She had caught me off guard. I don’t recall just how I replied, but I’m sure I said something awkward and stumbly and vaguely defensive, because that’s how I felt. Since then, I have been composing many fine retorts. My favorite goes something like this: “Yep. You bet it’s redundant and purposefully so. At least it should be, but the fact is our profession hasn’t always seen it that way.”

Teaching as a Process of Continuous Inquiry

BY PETER POUTIATINE

Roland Barth, the longtime educator and thinker, has observed that schools have always been well focused on learning—and we can see the evidence. We have learning specialists, study-skills curricula, test-taking accommodations, tutors and tutorials, writing centers, math labs, review days, and a growing expertise with individual learning styles. But what would a school look like, he wonders, that was as focused on teaching as it is on learning?

The first thing you’ll notice when you step into Marin Academy’s Center for Teaching and Learning is the atmosphere. It is inviting and sincere, a place in which you might linger, and yet it is frank and earnest, a place of intent. Inside this extraordinary place you’ll find plants, couches, rugs, natural light, pleasing décor, and teachers earnestly engaged with the seriousness of purpose in their own personal professional development. It is a sanctuary for all serious students of learning. As your first impressions give way to second looks, you might notice the bookcases that stand against one wall. They hold a growing collection of the best of education literature. You’ll find sections on education theory and reform, methods and curriculum, the brain, the history of American education, the newer ideas and insights as well as the seminal standards of the field, all arranged and cataloged. Nearby a bank of filing cabinets holds an amassed resource of lesson plans, syllabi, rubrics, handouts, readings, and other curricular materials, patiently collected and assiduously stored. As you begin to poke around with more sober scrutiny, you might notice the calendar of upcoming events. It serves to schedule an in-house seminar series, which regularly offers talks of direct or indirect pedagogical relevance. A small staff of coordinators promotes the seminars, manages the resources, and organizes a classroom observation network, which is activated at a teacher’s request and focused by a teacher’s need.

The Center for Teaching and Learning, launched in 2003 and which now inhabits the old student center, is a place to blend teaching and learning in daily practice. It is born of the conviction that every teacher is on a unique trajectory toward greatness and that our own individual professional development protocols are individually negotiated, case by case, day by day, need by need. It takes as its central tenets that students teach and teachers learn, that at the beginning of the 21st century there are more new things to know about the science of learning than ever before, and that mastery...
At its worst, drive-by staff development constitutes a deficit model of education that regards teachers as in periodic need of things they lack, discrete skills and approaches that can be supplied in an hour-long faculty meeting, a three-hour in-service workshop, or an all-day conference. The conventional model sees teachers as empty vessels in periodic need of filling. How long has it been since we stopped looking at students that way?

The conventional model is not only discretely portioned in content, and it regards a faculty as in uniform need of particular information at the same moment. In uniform need. As if all teachers were in need of the same shifts, the same understandings, the same insights, the same tools on the same day. The construction metaphor seems apt because whether it is a new assessment technique or a different way of understanding the student-teacher relationship, they are tools we use in the classroom, pedagogical tools. And over the course of a semester, I often feel like I am building an understanding, like a carpenter building a house. If a carpenter starts building in the fall he can’t wait until February to learn about concrete foundations. In February he is going to want to know about interior trim or paint perhaps. And a different builder building a different house is going to need different information and different tools at that time. He might not even be painting; he might be wallpapering. So, like a carpenter’s need for building tools, a teacher’s need for pedagogical tools is dependent on the particular challenge he is facing at the moment. We are not all in uniform need. No news here.

For me the building metaphor works on a different level too. After a really good conference or in-service day, I often feel excited, like I have just been to the hardware store and acquired a few new tools. The difference is that at the hardware store, I get to choose the tools that I need for the task I have in mind. Not so with the current model for delivering pedagogical tools. They are chosen for me by someone else and presented for my benefit at a time not of my choosing. My option is either to accept them or reject them, but I can’t choose to accept a different, more immediately useful tool, of course, because it isn’t offered. My challenge is to make the tool I am given fit my particular situation, which is an odd quandary. Imagine building a house that way. I need a hammer, but I am only given a really top-notch screwdriver.

Now, of course, this model works to some extent, though it probably works less often than we think because in the absence of an alternative we tend to view what we have in the best light. Still, we have all, I would think, experienced good professional development of lasting relevance and import. Regardless of a teacher’s specific classroom need, it helps to be familiar with Howard Gardner’s still-expanding theory of multiple intelligences. And regardless of subject matter or age group, it helps with lesson planning to know what neuroscientists currently understand about memory. Or the effect of emotions on higher-order cognitive abilities. Or what a colleague of mine calls the tyranny of low expectations. These things seem timeless, and indeed they are, but if a learner does not perceive an immediate usefulness for the new information, it will be harder to internalize, that is, harder to remember and bring forth to apply in appropriate situations later.

To be clear I am not arguing that the conventional model for professional development is not useful; I am saying that it is only half of the program. It relies on a set of assumptions about what teachers need and when they need it that makes it best suited for a specific kind of timeless material. I am saying that teachers experience challenges and needs for information on a daily basis that this model cannot meet. But I see education in flux on the cusp of the 21st century. I see the new science of learning capable of yielding some transformational breakthroughs for education, and we need a new model for on-going professional development that can keep pace.
inspire learning in our students, and like most of us, I have no doubt that we are successful much of the time. But that is precisely what amazed me; our profession is dedicated to bringing something about that we can’t yet even explain. And we do it! Wonder of wonders!

It is worth considering here for a moment why we need a cellular understanding of learning. Teaching is a well-established profession, after all, and students do learn in our classrooms. Why do we have to be able to explain learning if we know it when we see it? It is a good question, but we don’t ask it of other professions. Imagine the auto mechanic who says, “I don’t know what causes a car to run well, but I know it when I see it.” Or the doctor who says, “I don’t know what causes heart disease, but I know it when I see it.” With the science of learning advancing today as fast as it is, education is becoming, like medicine and psychology, a technically and technologically advanced profession. Knowing it when you see it just doesn’t allow for the level of manipulation of outcome and advancement of technique that these professions demand.

A hundred years ago medicine was at a stage of development equivalent to where teaching is now. Medicine was on the cusp of major breakthroughs—antiseptics, later penicillin, genetics—but doctors knew comparatively little about what caused the wellness or the sickness. Even so, people got better. But we can’t connect the two in a causal relationship; we only two things: what we did and what happened. If the patient died, they tried something else the next time. If the patient got better, they kept doing it. If the patient died, they tried something else the next time.

The social sciences call this a behaviorist approach and education has relied on it for the last 300 years. Conditioned response . . . positive and negative reinforcement . . . trial and error. But correlation does not imply causation. The behaviorist approach can’t tell us the cause of the behavior we witnessed; it can only tell us what seems to be correlated with it. Now pedagogical techniques come through our profession frequently: Cooperative learning, experiential education, project-based learning, concept attainment, direct instruction, think-pair-share, and a million others that I haven’t been around long enough to name. And we have no way of knowing whether they are effective or not, we think, until we try them. So we try them. We measure the results with an assessment, and if we like the results, we continue with the technique. If we don’t like the results, then we say the technique didn’t work, and we don’t do it again. The fact is this model can tell us only two things: what we did and what happened. But we can’t connect the two in a causal relationship: would the patient have recovered anyway?

Does this mean that all teachers have to become neuroscientists and researchers? No. Fortunately neuroscientists are content to do the research and gain the understandings for us. But with the recent advent of functional MRI and other advanced brain imaging technologies that allow us to see the brain in the act of learning, there is simply more to know about teaching and learning than ever before. So, what this does mean is that teachers need to stay abreast of recent and forthcoming developments in the science of learning and strive to apply the newfound understandings in the classroom. In the next 30 years our classrooms will be the proving grounds for the new science of learning and teachers will be the practitioners of these new understandings and insights. I can’t wait.

When I tell people I am a high school teacher, I often hear, “I have so much respect for teachers. What a hard job.” Although I do appreciate this comment, I often find myself thinking that these well-intentioned people don’t really understand my job. I don’t blame them at all, and when I graduated college five years ago, my thoughts about teaching were similar. Teaching, in my mind, was filled with lesson plans, teaching the same thing year after year, grading, and discipline. Now, I know how little any of these things have to do with my job.

The only thing I knew for sure was that I loved science; little did I know that not only would I fall in love with the craft of teaching, but also with the workings of the minds of teenagers. I quickly learned that transferring my love of science to students was the easiest part of my job. Where the art of teaching begins, however, is when I am able to step back and understand how a student is, or is not, processing and retaining information. A student understands this for an individual student, they can begin to guide them as he/she learns how to learn and to logically process new ideas. When I began teaching, I was lucky in that I was confident enough in my knowledge of science that, three years ago, I began on a new journey as a teacher seeking to understand how the adolescent mind learns.

As teachers we find great power in the idea that this journey will guide us and instruct us for all the years that lay ahead in the classroom. Consider the Marin Academy classrooms, full of talented and motivated stu-
involves hundreds of distinct biochemical reactions, learning. Each of these steps is complicated and to recall information that has been stored and apply where they can be "found again;" and later is able stored in a student's long term memory in a place pieces: the student is motivated to learn; new ideas are this is where the teacher can truly begin to teach. comprehend the subtle differences between each of us. different in each of us and this has profound affects on our abilities and behaviors. If we can understand the fundamental process of learning, we can begin to comprehend the subtle differences between each of us. This is where the teacher can truly begin to teach. Learning new information requires these major pieces: the student is motivated to learn; new ideas are stored in a student's long term memory in a place where they can be "found again;" and later is able to recall information that has been stored and apply that knowledge to a new situation, the true test of learning. Each of these steps is complicated and involves hundreds of distinct biochemical reactions, of which scientists still do not understand completely. Yet, there is sufficient information for us to begin to apply our knowledge of the link between our genes, our brains, and the environment to which we are exposed, in order to transform our understanding of what it means to be intelligent.

Motivation to learn begins to be shaped during childhood. As Gary Marcus explains in his book The Birth of the Mind, we are born with a set of genes that hands us the opportunity to learn, yet "experience alters the expression of these genes." In other words, our species holds the molecular capability to learn and remember new ideas due to our genes. But, without proper stimulation from the environment, we may never utilize these genes to their greatest extent. As Marcus continues, "in place of a view of the genome as a static blueprint that operates independently of experience and only up to the moment of birth, we have come to understand the genome as a complex, dynamic set of self-regulating recipes that actively modulate every step of life." Students must understand that they hold the capability to learn all types of new information; yet without motivation, leading to focus, these "learning genes" may never be turned on.

In his article "To Be Intelligent," John Abbott reminds us of the link between emotion and motivation. As he states, "The brain does not have to be taught to learn. To thrive, the brain needs plenty of stimulation. We are driven (the ancestral urges of long ago) as much by emotion as by logic. The brain is essentially a survival system, and emotional well-being may be more essential for survival than intellectual well-being." In order to truly be motivated to learn, a student cannot simply be told, "this information is important." Exceptional teachers appeal to the emotions of the student, thereby inspiring the student to relate the information to his own life. This learner is urged to explore independently, creating a room in his mind with his own hand where learning can occur . . . and the teacher gives a gift that will last a lifetime.

After creating this metaphorical room for knowledge, a student places the new information in a specific place within the room where he can find it again later. Mel Levine explains in his book A Mind at a Time, "[Long-term memory] massive storage vaults can be drawn upon throughout life. In fact, long-term memory is so enormously vast that there has been debate over whether information ever gets lost from long-term memory or whether, when we can't remember something, it is simply lost in long-term memory." The key to a strong long-term memory is carefully and purposefully putting the information in the correct room and, then, to file it in your brain; further, you must understand why exactly you are putting it there.

In my classroom, this idea of filing information has led me to use many learning “tools” to facilitate correct and logical placement of ideas—thinking of what we already know about a specific idea; employing fun mnemonic devices; relating material to everyday life stories. Proper filing makes the final stage of learning seemingly effortless. If a student knows exactly where the information she needs is stored, she can go straight to that room, find the file, and retrieve the necessary information. When a student is asked a question during class, the question is immediately placed on this small table, and the student begins to search for the answer in his long-term memory storage compartments. In some cases, the question falls off the table and they forget the question before finding the answer. The table top is simply not big enough to hold it all at once.

Especially during adolescence, this scenario can be exaggerated when anxiety clutters the table. Pressure to succeed in front of one’s peers, thoughts about troubles at home, or just simple stress can “infect one’s active working memory like a computer virus.” In most cases, as students mature, this active working memory “tabletop” grows in size. A weak active working memory holds the potential to make an incredibly talented and intelligent adolescent feel stupid and as adults, it is our job to help students see their own potential; our teenage brain is physiologically not the same as our adult brain.   

At twenty-six years old, I am energized by the idea that I have the rest of my life to investigate how learning works and the implications this has for our schools. Five years ago, if you had asked me where I would be today, there is no way I would have said teaching, and I love this fact. I feel that I am one of the lucky few whose profession found them. Most certainly, lesson plans, grading, and discipline are not foremost on my mind. Instead, my professional life is guided by a pursuit to reach an understanding of how learning works, and how this knowledge can change the way we teach.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

This self-taught, award winning recording engineer with Tarpan Studios in San Rafael, began his music recording as a student at Marin Academy and found his passion through a life changing Minicourse experience. Over his twenty year recording career, Jim Reitzel has owned and occupied several studios and has consistently played bass in several nationally touring bands. He currently works at the private recording studio of world-renowned producer, Narada Michael Walden, engineering albums for artists such as Aretha Franklin and Whitney Houston, whose thank-you notes adorn the walls. Jim has worked with over twenty Grammy winning artists and on seven gold records. He opened his own recording studio in 1987 and has developed his career from there.

Jim Reitzel personifies the give-and-take that Marin Academy strives to instill in its students. He simply could not imagine it any other way. He appreciates that Marin Academy introduced him to his passion—no small initiation for someone who makes it his life work. He openly praises those educators who instilled the most essential of lessons “Jim Baldwin taught me how to jam . . . how to listen . . . how to play with others . . . how to actually to jam . . . how to listen . . . how to play with others . . . how to actually not play, but leave windows. I still, to this day, hold him in the regard of one of my most influential mentors.” He participated in recording minicourses and internships, and in the encouraging environment that is Marin Academy, complete with practice rooms, open doors, and recording studios, Jim Reitzel honed MA his most prized possession: music.

And then he gave it back. Shortly after graduation, Jim Reitzel had the rare opportunity to open a recording studio. Albeit an unusual circumstance, what he has done with this resource is just as noteworthy. Jim Reitzel has led (or co-led) a Marin Academy Minicourse every year since he graduated—the one thing that has remained consistent over that period, and he doesn’t anticipate that changing. He assures me: “No matter where I am in my career I would take the time to do that. Because it’s important! I love teaching. And if I love seeing kids inspired by their own creativity—it’s not about how to set up a particular microphone or how a particular box works, because in a week there’s no way I can show these kids (or anyone) how to become a recording engineer. The most important thing for me is to inspire them to want to go on and pursue whatever they see as music for them.” And while the styles may change and the students’ stories may continue to age him, the passion, talent, and soul of the Marin Academy Jim remembers is still alive; a unique glimpse into the life of MA over an almost twenty-year span of school growth.

But Jim Reitzel does not offer his time and studio to MA students each year to check up on the latest fashion trends of teenagers. “Every year is a constant education for me, and I would imagine that’s how it is for every teacher. You have to constantly readjust your teaching— you can’t teach the same way to different people. A particular box works, because in a week there’s no way I could show these kids (or anyone) how to become a recording engineer. The most important thing for me is to inspire them to want to go on and pursue whatever they see as music for them.” And while the styles may change and the students’ stories may continue to age him, the passion, talent, and soul of the Marin Academy Jim remembers is still alive; a unique glimpse into the life of MA over an almost twenty-year span of school growth.

Long-time Marin Academy history teacher, James Shipman, provided the planning map for Hasana’s first expedition: college. Fascinated by her Asian Studies courses at Marin Academy and experiences such as Vision Quest, she began her studies at Occidental College as a Religious Studies major. She had found an inspiration, and followed it. But is life that clear and direct? For some, perhaps, but Hasana is brilliantly susceptible to fresh ideas, and as a result of treasured college professor, Warren Montag, soon added Comparative Literature as a major. Montag had offered a compelling presentation of French philosophy and literary criticism and happened to be deeply engaged in a project on a 17th century philosopher Benedict De Spinoza. Hasana walked directly through the door in Germany—it cannot be explained.”

Hasana Sharp epitomizes the student as a sponge, soaking up every ounce of opportunity, knowledge, influence, and self exploration. Her approach to learning and the purpose of her studies have evolved over her educational journey, and while her life has allowed for paths leading away from education, she has returned to the pursuit of learning. Her ultimate, and not so distant, goal is to become a professor and “provoke in others the experience by which the world and oneself can once again become strange, striking, and full of wonder.”

A graduate of Occidental College and a Fulbright Scholar, Hasana Sharp is in the final year of a graduate program that will result in a PhD in philosophy from Pennsylvania State University. Her program specializes in “continental philosophy”—French and German rather than Anglophone—and her dissertation will examine Benedict De Spinoza, a 17th century philosopher, whose family was Portuguese but who was born and lived in Amsterdam. Hasana explains that while “Spinoza is relatively understudied among figures of that period, in France he is a national preoccupation—something like David Hasselhoff in Germany—it cannot be explained.”

While stimulated by her focused studies, Hasana was also taking courses in education, was very involved with the feminist groups on campus, and thought she would teach high school or do non-profit work benefitting women. She explains: “I wanted to do something that seemed to have very concrete, tangible benefits.” And she did just that. Upon graduation, Hasana maintained her interest in social service and spent a year working for women at risk for HIV/AIDS. “After a year in social services I was frustrated with how difficult that is, and how personally unequipped I was to help people who are really good at that, and could never play guitar. You could give them the best teachers in the world and they would never be able to shred like Jordan—because he’s wired and programmed for that. We’re wired for different things. Some people need help to find what their thing is. A lot of people’s minds are not properly opened just because their teachers didn’t use the right can opener. Certain can openers work for certain cans. And a good teacher is like a Swiss army knife—with a billion different blades.”

During my time at the studio with Jim Reitzel, I could be easily awestruck by the gold records that line the walls or the informal photographs of Whitney Houston on the desk. But it was Jim’s dedication, motivation, and talent in working with MA students that left me speechless. “When I graduated, I wanted to be a Jim Baldwin for other people.” Thank you, Jim for keeping those influences thriving at MA.
with very serious problems. I ended up pursuing what to me seemed like a selfish pleasure, because I felt relatively disempowered to save the world.”

Looking to satiate her rekindled thirst for knowledge and interest in philosophy introduced by Warren Montag, she took focused courses on Spinoza, researched at the Spinoza library, and participated in multiple Spinoza colloquia. She admits, “I feared it would be a bit like Spinoza boot camp, but it has been an extremely encouraging and cooperative atmosphere. It is really wonderful to be in a milieu where people really love what you love, are extremely excited to talk about mind-bogglingly obscure philosophical doctrines, and who really believe that this thinker has something—a different vision of the world—to offer.”

As someone hoping to become professor in the very near future, my goal is to provoke in others the experience by which the world and oneself can once again become strange, striking, full of wonder.”

“I simply love philosophy, feel extremity at home in the way of talking and thinking, and it helps me understand and respond to the burdens of not being able to fix everything single-handedly. I no longer feel that philosophy is a vain pursuit, but that the ability to see the world in radically different ways as a result of getting inside these different systems and explanations of reality is the beginning of being able to live, feel, and act differently, with more freedom and self-determination. I believe that teaching philosophy can give students real tools to understand themselves and the world better, and thereby more power to determine their lives.”

Hanana had traveled down that well-worn path of realization and shift in thinking that educating yourself not only improves you as an individual, but all of those around you. The power of influence, as suggested by shipman and Montag, is one of the strongest pulls in life, to be able to serve the world in that capacity a gift. She now recognizes “learning is its own, extremely valuable end, even as it has immediate benefits over and above its simple pleasures.” Navigating through the strong influence of the James Shipmans, Warren Montags, and Benedict De Spinozas of the world—Hanana has found her own place, and will soon follow in their paths as she serves as an influence to others.

Just wait . . . this is only the beginning. Arthur Chan has offerings to bring to this world that we cannot even imagine at this point, but we can anxiously await. While Arthur’s service to Marin Academy during his time here covered multiple arenas, he admits that the most meaningful was his work with Crossroads. While he does not regret his other contributions to the community, they do not seem to have as much impact now, in the grand scheme of life. He simply does not want to be remembered by a winning tennis match, or impressive piano recital. Not to worry, Arthur . . . you won’t be.

Arthur’s first exposure to teaching was through an after school art class for middle-schoolers on a rotating basis. For most people, this experience would fulfill as a service to others, a contribution to society, a feel-good experience, a tangible sense of accomplishment. But to Arthur, it was not enough. “My first introduction to teaching was random shots of faces that I just couldn’t familiarize myself with. It was not terribly rewarding for me.” And then he met Rey Fernández, his Honors Pre-Calculus teacher and Director of Crossroads. Arthur spent a great deal of time with Rey, who began to mentor the high school junior. He absorbed information about the upcoming program, and was anxious to become involved. While Arthur had been told they were only looking to hire college students, in the end, “Rey did offer me a job—definitely a life changing moment.”

The expanded classroom opened, and Arthur eagerly enrolled. What awaited him was a constant, sometimes overwhelming, enlightening, and often unintended education. For his first summer with the Crossroads program (in its inaugural year), Arthur worked under Rey and relished the opportunity to “Rey as a teacher of teaching, as opposed to just a teacher of math . . . and learning differently from him—instead of sine and cosine, it was different methods of teaching in the classroom.”

“In my classes after that summer, while I was primarily there to learn, subconsciously I was observing different techniques that teachers employed and thinking about how I could apply that to what I was doing over the summer. Even how a teacher places him/herself in the classroom and how that changes the dynamic. Mark Stefanski (MA Science teacher) had mentioned that to me last summer when he observed me in the classroom where you place yourself relative to your students is very important. If you stay in one spot, their attention wanders off.”

Arthur quickly recognized the difference in control between student and teacher, and it went a different way than expected. “Being a student, you’re in control of your own destiny—you can either read the material, or don’t. If you read it, chances are you’ll understand what you’re talking about and can participate in a discussion.” As a teacher, you are not always the master of your subject. You may be, or may have sufficiently refreshed yourself of the material, but even with the highest level of mastery, you are never in complete control of the outcome of a classroom. For Arthur, learning how to teach on a daily basis, he experienced a classroom in a distinct light. “It was just a different experience of being in a classroom, but out of control.”

After three years with the Crossroads program, Arthur holds a strong grasp of the joys, challenges, and successes associated with such an endeavor. He acknowledges his time with the students as “an opportunity to take different parts from my teachers and try and incorporate them into my own teaching style—in effect, try to give them MA.” And he has achieved this lofty goal with alacrity, compassion, an open mind, and hard work. What makes a good teaching day for Arthur? “When you say ‘class is over’ and they had no idea.” It is rare for an experience to be truly mutually beneficial, but it is challenging to determine where Crossroads begins and Arthur ends.

“It has defined my experience as a person—up until now” he admits. “Learning about other things in the world, and myself at the same time, and doing/succeeding/dealing with it hands-on was amazing. If I had tried to learn this, it would never have worked.”

Arthur is starting an after-school art and learning program in Washington D.C. called DRAW (Defining our Roots through Art & Writing). While loosely modeled after Crossroads in terms of philosophy and student and faculty composition, Arthur has taken Rey’s initiative and made something his own—perhaps the highest compliment to a mentor.
On January 22, 2004 the Marin Academy community was privileged to welcome Dr. Cornel West as its speaker for the 5th Annual James F. Thacher Lecture.

**BY BRANDON NICHOLSON ’01**

Currently Professor of Religion at Princeton University, Dr. West is considered one of the most gifted, provocative, and important public intellectuals in the country. He received his AB in Near Eastern languages and literature from Harvard University and earned his doctorate in philosophy at Princeton. A recipient of the American Book Award, he is the author of numerous articles and books including the Cornell West Reader, The African American Century, and the best-selling Race Matters, which was published in 1993 and changed the course of America’s dialogue on race, justice and democracy. His two newest works, Democracy Matters and Race and Class in America, will be published in late 2004.

When I was first asked to introduce Dr. Cornel West before he spoke at Marin Academy this past January, I was somewhat tentative. Not only would it be an intimidating experience to introduce such an incredibly eloquent and thoughtful intellectual, but I did not feel that I knew Dr. West well enough to represent him to hundreds of people from the M.A. community. In the end, however, I realized that the school was providing me with the rare opportunity to participate in one of the most significant events to take place at M.A. since its inception, and I could not pass that up. This was especially true since it was this school that first exposed me to Dr. West nearly seven years earlier.

In the winter of my freshman year in high school, I was fortunate enough to represent Marin Academy at the Student Leadership and Diversity Conference in St. Louis, MO. Although simply attending the conference was an honor and a memorable experience in and of itself, the event was enhanced by the fact that Dr. West, author of the bestselling Race Matters, was the keynote speaker. I was struck by his ability to express his ideas in a way that was so extravagant and yet so down to earth. At that time he was speaking about race, but I have come to learn that the scope of his knowledge stretches far beyond matters of race and ethnicity. As I now attend Princeton University, where Dr. West is a professor of religion, I have heard him speak many times since that conference in St. Louis, and he continues to impress me with his intellectual prowess and immense oratorical ability. His performance at M.A. was no exception.

While there is no doubt that never in its history had M.A. played host to an event of this magnitude, the moment I stepped into the gymnasium it felt as if it were meant to be. At a school that is known for its intellectual community, the space was filled with hundreds of people—from numerous backgrounds—who had gathered to hear one of academia’s most prominent forward thinkers. In an environment that challenges each student to “think, question, and create,” Dr. West’s talk fell right in line with that mission. He forced us to challenge our own beliefs and examine our own responsibilities in this society. While M.A. has always been a positive and welcoming community, one could not help but be struck by Dr. West’s “Hotel America” analogy, where the lights are always on and the beds are always clean, despite any challenges or adverse conditions that may surround it. I know that there are times when Marin Academy appears to be this way—when things may seem a little too happy or a little too positive—and it was great that the professor put the concept out in the open. But what struck me the most about that night was Dr. West’s spirit, which made just as much of an impact on the audience as his words. Needless to say, the gym had a special feel that night.

Although I am extremely grateful for the fact that I was able to introduce Professor West, I am even more appreciative of the fact that I was able to be present at such an incredible event. Seven years after having first met him, I am still amazed and inspired by his overall presence. Since he spoke at M.A., I have been fortunate enough to meet and converse with the professor in his office on numerous occasions. I will add that to the list of things which I attribute to Marin Academy, a community that has provided me with so much over the years. Most importantly, I am glad that the school was able to expose the students to an experience and way of thinking that may have been alien to them up until that evening. For those who attended, the event served as a vital part of their college and life preparation.
Crossroads Update

The 2004–2005 year marks a special moment for Crossroads, now in its third year of operation. Because the program requires a three-year commitment from its student participants, this year we are at maximum enrollment of 60 students for the first time. It’s also a milestone because our inaugural class of ’05 will be completing its participation in the program this spring and moving onto high school.

This year’s summer session was a tremendous success—students were engaged in dynamic classroom activities, artistic projects, outdoor adventures and just plain fun. Our yearly Festival event featured a range of projects and presentations that were developed during the five-week session.

Leading them along the way was a group of remarkable teachers comprised of both novices and professionals. This year’s summer faculty included a number of MA alumni: Adriana Baer ’01, Kendra Berenson ’02, Azalee Bostrom ’02, Arthur Chan ’03, and Stacey McIlhane ’04. Serving as office assistants were Thomas Heidinger ’07 and Mayra Munguia ’07.

During this academic year, Crossroads will again depend heavily on the energy and enthusiasm of MA student volunteers. Twice per week, these volunteers meet with Crossroads students to work with them on homework and encourage good study habits.

4th Annual Rafael Film Night

“SPIN” DIRECTED BY JAMES REDFORD

Marin Academy and the California Film Institute joined efforts to bring James Redford’s “Spin” to the Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center for the Marin Academy community. This year’s 4th Annual Rafael Film Night marked an exciting development for the event as its proceeds were directed toward the school’s Crossroads Program, an outreach and education program serving middle school students from San Rafael’s Canal community.

“Spin,” based on the novel by Don Axinn, tells the story of an orphaned boy raised by a surrogate Hispanic family in the 1950’s. A striking southwest landscape serves as the backdrop for Redford’s conscientious depiction of a teenager’s conflicts with ideas of his family, culture, past and future.

Marin Academy extends special thanks to Mark Fishkin, Executive Director of the Film Institute of Northern California and parent of Lindsay ’07, and filmmaker Jamie Redford for making this event possible.

Alumni Art Show

Work by alumni artists was showcased in the new Visual Arts Center as part of Fall Festival’s Alumni Art Show. The media ranged from photography to bookmaking, and illustrated the continued pursuit of artistic excellence and passion. As Matt Minnega ’02 stated about his future in photography: “At this point, I can’t imagine my life without it.”

A special thank you to our alumni contributors and the Marin Academy Art Department for their extensive help in making this evening possible.

Fun Run/Walk

On the morning of October 11, 2003, more than eighty participants descended on MA’s campus for the 2nd Annual Crossroads Fun Run/Walk. The 5-kilometer event attracted a range of participants—from casual walkers to seasoned competitive runners. By any measure, the Fun Run/Walk was a success. All proceeds were donated to Crossroads, a Marin Academy program that serves middle school students from San Rafael. Of course, all members of the MA community are welcome to join us for the next Fun Run/Walk. We hope to see you there!
Fall BBQ Lunch and Activities

Marin Academy Boosters Club served a free lunch. Student Senate organized a cake decorating contest, face painting, and games; student and faculty bands (Bob, Z Rivers, and Chromatic) played to the crowd. The efforts of multiple groups resulted in entertainment for current families and alumni.

Mill Valley Film Festival Comes to MA

The 26th Annual Mill Valley Film Festival came to MA for a Friday evening screening of “Every Child is Born a Poet: The Life and Work of Piri Thomas.” The inspiring film was followed by a Question & Answer session with filmmaker Jonathan Robinson and his charismatic subject, Piri Thomas, and facilitated by MA English teacher, Alison Park. The Performing Arts Theater filled to capacity with a delighted audience and we look forward to this continued partnership in years to come.

2004 E.E Ford Recipients

Established in 1991 with a grant from the Edward E. Ford Foundation, the annual fellowship enables Marin Academy faculty members the opportunity to undertake a major project that cannot normally be accommodated during the academic year. Congratulations to both of this year’s deserving recipients.

ANITA MATTISON MATH DEPARTMENT HEAD (CAKED TO MARIN ACADEMY IN 1992)

In an effort to broaden her knowledge and understanding of issues in math education across an international spectrum, Anita Mattison was awarded one of two 2004 E.E. Ford Fellowships to attend the 2004 International Congress on Mathematical Education in Copenhagen, Denmark. This annual conference offers the opportunity to bring current issues, research, and practices in mathematics alive through conversation, observation, and participation, and back to the classroom. Comparing the math achievements and preparedness of U.S. students to those in other countries, most studies show the U.S. falling behind other developed countries. Recognizing this challenge, Anita is anxious to “learn more from [her] international colleagues about practices that may help improve classroom effectiveness here at MA.”

ALISON PARK ENGLISH TEACHER, POET (CAKED TO MARIN ACADEMY IN 2003)

The art of balance … student, teacher, writer, athlete, unabashed fan of other poets; Alisson Park. In seeking out time for practice as a poet-teacher, Alison attended the Summer Literary Series in St. Petersburg, Russia. She identifies, “the experience of someone else’s classroom is a potentially revolutionizing crucible for any educator,” and appreciates the critique, audience, instruction, demonstration and accountability that accompanies such an experience. In addition to two-week workshops with renowned poets Brenda Hillman and Gaylord Brewster, Alison attended additional seminars in Basic Russian, Arts Criticism, and Untranslatable Russian, to two-week workshops with renowned poets Brenda Hillman and Gaylord Brewster, Alison attended additional seminars in Basic Russian, Arts Criticism, and Untranslatable Russian, exploring Dostoevsky’s old haunts, and learning about Russian jazz.

New Faculty

JENNIFER COTÉ [Math]

Jen Coté joins the MA Math Department after six years at the Marin Country Day School teaching 8th grade math and an additional three additional years of experience at the Hathaway Brown School in Cleveland. Jen brings a range of interests to the community; and has also worked as a consultant for new teachers and curriculum development. She received her B.A. from Middlebury College with a double major in Economics and Political Science and a minor in Mathematics, and went on to earn her MA at Stanford University in Curriculum Studies and Teacher Education with a focus on Mathematics. Her Master’s Project on Effective Groupwork in the Mathematics Classroom is pending publication.

J. O’MALLEY [English and Junior Class Dean]

With a wealth of independent school experience, MA’s newest English teacher and Class Dean joins us from the East Coast. J. O’Malley holds her Bachelor of Art from Mount Saint Mary’s College as an English major and a Masters in Modern Studies from Loyola College. After eleven years of the Severn School and DeWitt Ave School, serving in multiple capacities (English Teacher, Senior Dean, Department Chair, Student Government Advisor, soccer and basketball coach) J. looks forward to her new life out west.

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Marin Academy educates equitably because it fosters academics, athletics, and the arts in a both a passionate and balanced fashion. Students and faculty move between these worlds and moreover are encouraged to do so. To some degree, it is an expectation that faculty will teach, yes, all the while pursuing and sharing their passions. Their passions inspire, evolve, and redefine educator and student: an osmotic effect for both parties. An English teacher by trade, I have pursued in tandem with a love of English literature, a passion for athletics, uncovered a love and commitment to and for the outdoors through Minicourse and Vision Quest, and discovered a love of music (something never experienced prior to Marin Academy)—all inspired by my colleagues and students.

Marin Academy is a place where passions fuel students and teachers alike. One could say it’s a Petri dish where fabulous eruptions of passion flourish. It’s a place where saying “Yes!” to one’s passion is celebrated and expected, and I feel fortunate to have been touched by this inspiration and will carry that learning forward wherever I go. As a community we recognize the infinite potential in a student and, too, do we acknowledge and honor it in a teacher. I look forward to observing the unfurled blossoms in the next faculty member who says, “Thienan my passion lives!” My hope is not “What does she know about it anyhow?” but rather “How far will she take it!” Thank you, M.A.

When Bodie named me interim athletic director, I was inspired by the challenge, despite the rumblings I heard: “what does this woman English teacher know about athletics anyhow? How is some woman English teacher going to manage the athletic program?”

My plan was to use common sense and experience—two tested virtues I sensed would load the department and me in the right direction. I hoped to be an assistant athletic director before becoming an AD so I could witness a program in action. Instead it was trial by fire—a rite of passage for which I am grateful.

Yes, this woman would turn in American Literature, Pacific Crossings, grading papers, and literary discourse for sport. The Greeks would be proud. What individual would be complete without a balance of the two?

I always had actually. Beneath my work wardrobe—ball cap, ripped sweatshirts and flip-flops—is a woman committed to scholarship. Scholarship was the priority in my educational experience and yet without athletics paralleling pedagogy in both my high school and college tenure, I would have been incomplete. Athletics provided the necessary decompression I needed from a heavy academic load, improved the discipline and commitment I bring to every endeavor, and above all demanded I work in relationship to others to fulfill a goal, to better the team, to better myself. The latter skill, building trusting relationships, has been by far one of the greatest lessons garnered. My relationship with teammates and our shared moments are what I remember most, far more actually than most academic classes.

Marin Academy endorses the thoughtful student-athlete. The athletic program is one of the most unique in the state, with athletic director Heather Rogers stepping down as Athletic Director, the quest was on to find a new AD who could meet the standard she so effectively established.

When the MA community learned that its own indefatigable Heather Rogers was stepping down as Athletic Director, the quest was on to find a new AD who could meet the standard she so effectively established.

To our great good fortune, we found that person in Joe Harvey, originally from the Midwest, Joe Harvey was raised in Illinois, and graduated from Joliet Catholic High School in 1985 where he was a three-sport athlete and valedictorian of the graduating class. He attended Harvard University, earning a bachelor’s degree in Government in 1989. At Harvard, he began rowing during his freshman year and became captain of the varsity lightweight men’s crew team during his senior year when they won the National Championship. He earned his master’s degree in English from Middlebury College’s Breadloaf School of English in 2002.

Joe, who has taught English and held the position of Junior Class Dean at MA for the past three years, previously served as Upper School Head at St. Stephen’s Episcopal School in Texas, and spent eight years teaching English and coaching crew at Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts. Before that, he worked as an analyst at Goldman Sachs in New York, working in corporate finance and equity capital markets. Joe and his wife, Amanda, are parents of a young son, Jack.

Although Joe is just beginning his fourth year at MA, it feels like he’s always been here. During his second year at MA, the senior class selected him as the Faculty speaker at graduation, a testament to the impact he’s had on the community in a relatively short time. Whether leading a discussion of Catcher in the Rye, navigating the emotional tumult of the junior class during the “all- important” school year, or preparing for his next triathlon, Joe is a person who, in the words of a colleague “is willing to go in both feet. A natural leader, he is accessible, extremely committed, crazy smart and incredibly loyal. Joe Harvey is a real school guy.”

A scholar athlete in the truest sense of the word, MA welcomes Joe Harvey to the helm of the Athletic Office.
You are invited to take pleasure in the work of Marin Academy student photographers. Under the guidance of Art teacher Jenny Rosenberg, MA students work with black and white, color, film, and digital to create works of art. Here is a snapshot of the caliber of talent that exists at Marin Academy.
The Outstanding Sportsperson Awards go to one senior male and female athlete annually who embody Marin Academy’s athletic mission. These scholar athletes are known for their skill and prowess in their respective sport or sports, their selfless contribution to the betterment of their team, and their unfaltering work ethic. In addition, these scholar athletes model integrity and the highest standard of sportsmanship in their athletic endeavors.

SPORTSMAN RIO BEARDSLEY ’04
A three season athlete, Rio Beardsley is strongly recognized for his commitment to athletics at MA and devotion to his peers. His water polo coaches note that he is “one of those athletes that could do anything he put his mind to. He would play any position that we asked him to, and was always willing to do whatever was best for the team.” On his own accord, Rio joined the Terra Linda High School wrestling team—competing in the non-league matches and attending daily practices. What impressed Assistant Athletic Director, Josh Kalkstein, the most was “his ability to help others. He constantly has helped younger students by offering advice and support in the fitness center . . . he just always has time for them.” His track coach, Liz Gottlieb, reflects that over recent years, “we have witnessed his leadership, dedication, responsibility and stellar sportsmanship grow tremendously. He has worked diligently to establish himself as a leader. During the off-season he has spent many hours in the weight room, he also practices pilates, and organizes captain’s practices. Rio is currently a freshman at Claremont McKenna College.

SPORTSWOMAN DORSI BONNER ’04
“From day one it has always been obvious that this athlete’s number one concern is for the play of her team and how they represent their school. I have become a better person from my experience of coaching this woman. She is competitive, yet competes with integrity and always finds a way to bring out the best in everyone’ says soccer coach, Josh Kalkstein. Dorsi’s water polo coach adds, “she displays every positive characteristic a coach could want from an athlete. She was always there, motivated, and ready to give her all for the team. She inspired her teammates to greater challenges every day. During games, she would rise to another level and bring her teammates with her. She has developed a keen sense of integrity and sportsmanship that we will always remember.” Dorsi is currently a freshman at New York University.

SPORTSMAN BRAD YUSKA ’04
Brad Yuska has achieved in boys’ soccer what no other male athlete has at MA—a member of a four-time BCL West Championship team and a two-time NCS Championship team. A four-time 1st team recipient, named to the NSCAA All-Far West All American team in his junior year, Brad was awarded the California State player of the year and was selected to play in the high school McDonald’s All American game (summer, 2004). Brad currently attends Indiana University, and is a member of their 2002 NCAA Division I Champion soccer team.

SPORTSWOMAN ERIKA HEINEKEN ’04
eRika Heineken competed on the women’s Varsity Volleyball team for four years and was a captain of the 2003 state semifinalist team. As a freshman and sophomore she played basketball for the Wildcats and managed to survive during her freshman and senior years. Erika is currently a freshman at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut.

Erika Heineken delivered at the Sports Banquet, May 16, 2004

“After four years of playing many different high school sports, I now realize that what I thought would make my sports experience great, wasn’t so important. In fact, it’s those completely unexpected things that I remember most. Being on the varsity basketball team as a freshman was a surprise, and turned out to be the best sports season I have ever had. Our team was the underdog that year, but we won it to the playoffs and came within 2 points of being the BCL champs. When I recall that game, I never think about my 20 seconds of playing time, but remember the jam-packed gym, the excitement, and how it felt like the crowd was practically throwing themselves on the court.”

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Reflections on a Mission Statement

By J. D. Nasaw ’04

During my four years at Marin Academy, I spent very little time contemplating the mission statement. I never really understood how my teachers were shaping the way I think and act, pushing the students to “think, question and create” as the mission statement implies. Until I went outside the classroom and observed the degree of independence that MA instills in its students, the mission statement stresses the importance of the “individual” leading to an unparalleled level of leadership and participation in all areas of high school life. I was repeatedly impressed by the integrity and awareness present at each one of the student-led activities or initiatives I attended or witnessed.

Between sports teams and music groups, student-written plays and student-choreographed dance shows, and student-produced publications like Echoes and the Voice, each student at Marin Academy is given trust, freedom, and responsibility by their teachers and coaches. Especially in my junior and senior years, I was encouraged to take part in an independent study in music, a senior project, and Vision Quest, each of which demanded that I take responsibility for my own education. During my four years at MA, I repeatedly took the mission statement for granted and did not fully appreciate how the school focuses on each student, gives everyone widespread responsibility, and is full of compassion, a combination unique to the Marin Academy community. It silently shapes how we think and act at school and beyond.

I want to thank each and every Marin Academy student, parent, faculty member and teacher for inspiring me each day and the virtues contained in the philosophy and mission statements, for helping me find my love of learning, and for making the last four years so rewarding.

J.D. is now a freshman at Brown University.
This year, Marin Academy had the pleasure of bringing Alumni Fireside Chats to the Bay Area. Alumni hosted informal evenings, proving to be a great way to reconnect/meet other MA alumni, and learn about what is happening at Marin Academy today. Head of School, Bodie Brizendine, spoke about the state of MA today and introduced the School’s Long Range Plan, “Marin Academy 2008: Meeting the Challenges.” They were truly wonderful evenings, all reaffirming the strength of MA’s past, present, and future.

A special thank you to our generous alumni hosts Walter Sanford ’80 and Ellen Haller ’76 for sharing their homes with the community.

In a new development for Marin Academy’s alumni program, this year’s Board of Trustees supported a committee focused solely on alumni issues. Co-Chaired by Board members Jennifer Haas-Dehejia ’90 and Amy Clifford Jones ’86, the committee identified its strategic goal to “develop an outreach/communication plan with alumni that will foster pride and personal connection to the school.” In support of this, the group took on two major initiatives: creating and conducting an on-line survey to the alumni body to better determine the needs of the constituency, and defining a model for a future alumni leadership team. Both of these goals were accomplished, and provided the school with a strong foundation on which to foster the growth of the alumni program. We are pleased to announce that Zack Scott ’99 will be serving as the President of our newly forming Alumni Leadership Team, effective Fall 2004.

In an effort to work together to examine ways Marin Academy was serving the needs of our alumni community, the Alumni Development Committee developed an on-line survey to help evaluate the effectiveness of connection, activities, communication, and philanthropy for our alumni body and to learn more about their lives after MA. And it worked! Thank you to the many respondents for taking the time to lend your input, the results were enlightening and invaluable. Look for these results in future publications.

Parents of Alumni

Parents of Alumni: your children may have moved away from Marin Academy, but you don’t have to! The Alumni Office and Marin Academy Parents Association invite you to be a part of the Parents of Alumni Association, a new initiative to sustain your connection to the MA community. Please contact the Advancement Office 415.453.3616 x221, if you would like to continue volunteering for Marin Academy, in a variety of capacities.