

Marshall Memo 88

A Weekly Round-up of Important Ideas and Research in K-12 Education
May 24, 2005

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Quotes of the Week

"The high correlations between ability and achievement tests are, in a sense, a measure of the relative ineffectiveness of teachers at managing classroom learning."
Graham Nuthall (see item #1)

"Will this action help or hurt students? What message will my action send to the staff concerning the importance of student learning? Is my action supporting a professional learning community?"
Harvey Alvy and Pam Robbins (see item #2)

"To act ethically and with integrity, some principals need to make the bold and sometimes agonizing decisions necessary to relieve a school of the few teachers who do not serve the needs of students."
ibid.

"It's really hard to be a teacher. We have to work hard and play hard."
Joe Ruzicka, principal of Capital High School in Boise, Idaho (see item #3)

"It's really an exciting activity. It's like proving you're smart."
Vu Chu, Massachusetts student, on his high-school math club (see item #8)

1. Telling Ain't Teaching and Listening Ain't Learning

In this sobering article, education professor Graham Nuthall tells the story about a fifth-grade classroom of 28 students taught by Mrs. Middleton, an enthusiastic and energetic teacher. The teacher has allowed her students to choose their learning activities in a science unit on space, and students are busily working. Rebecca, a high-achieving student whose father taught her the order of the planets when she was five, loves this kind of project and is immersed in a pile of library books learning about the surface of Mars. Joel, a struggling student, is looking at the pictures in a library book about his project, "The Life of an Astronaut."

Mrs. Middleton walks around the classroom checking on students' work and helps those who need it. She knows her students well, and she believes that because Rebecca and Joel are not asking for help, they're doing OK. She "knows" that Joel is a low-ability student and expects little of him. He knows this and has figured out how to meet her expectations. Mrs. Middleton "knows" that Rebecca is a high-ability student and expects her to be working on several books simultaneously and writing a multi-page report. Rebecca understands her teacher's expectations and has learned how to meet them with minimal effort.

Nuthall's analysis: "Mrs. Middleton is a successful teacher. The students like her and try to please her. The principal is impressed with the efficient way she organizes and manages an individualized program. He proudly tells parents that she runs a program that caters to the individual needs of each student. But because Mrs. Middleton believes that the busy classroom is the learning classroom and that students' behavior is a function of their ability, she has no idea that Joel or Rebecca are actually learning. Joel is not reading any of the text of the book in front of him, but is looking at the pictures (he never completes his project, offering excuses about leaving it at home, losing it, or promising to bring it in for homework). Rebecca knew all that she wrote in her report before this unit on space began. Day by day it is like this. The smoothly organized routines are played out. The students are constantly moving around, busy at their tasks. Mrs. Middleton sees what she expects to see. Joel and Rebecca know how to meet her different expectations equally well. But Joel is headed for serious failure and Rebecca for outstanding success."

Mrs. Middleton was shocked when Nuthall and his colleagues showed her the results of achievement tests and interviews: the higher-achieving students had learned no more during the science unit than lower-achieving students. She said their

information must be wrong. She knows her students and how hard they worked, and she believes her program was successful. "Such is the power," concludes Nuthall, "of culture and the routines and myths by which teachers structure and understand daily life in their classrooms."

In the remainder of the article, Nuthall recounts his gradual realization over 45 years of research that there are no significant differences in what novice and veteran teachers do in their classrooms (both follow the American cultural script for teaching) and that very few teachers change the entering characteristics of their students in a meaningful way. American teachers, he says, are brought up to believe that innate ability is the key factor in student achievement. They assume that if they follow certain routines and keep students "on task," most students will learn – and if some students don't, it's because they lack the ability. "Commonly held beliefs about student ability," writes Nuthall, "are a very powerful way of explaining the effects of teaching by diverting attention away from the effectiveness of teaching routines and attributing differences in learning to characteristics of students."

This belief in innate ability leads most teachers to ignore the evidence that interim assessments could give them about whether students are really learning. Instead, they follow the script, monitor students' compliance, and grade them on summative assessments. "Unlike the conductor who can hear the players in the orchestra," says Nuthall, "the teacher is largely cut off from information about what individual students are learning. Teachers are forced to rely on secondary indicators such as the visible signs that students are motivated and interested. They are sustained, however, by the commonly held belief that if students are engaged most of the time in appropriate activities, some kind of learning will be taking place."

Nuthall says that the myth about teaching used to be that "school learning is a direct consequence of teaching... it is assumed that whatever the teacher explains or demonstrates automatically and simultaneously becomes part of the knowledge of the student. It is this view of learning that justifies the teacher's standing in front of the class and talking." Nowadays, a new myth is gradually replacing the old one: that if students are engaged in activities and talking to their classmates, they are constructing their own knowledge – and therefore learning. "What has changed," says Nuthall, "is the concept of what constitutes an effective 'learning activity.' What has not changed is the mythical belief that engaging in learning activities (such as listening to the teacher talking, discussing the results of an experiment, or writing a report on an investigation) transfers the content of the activity to the mind of the student."

This linear, cause-and-effect myth of teaching and learning, says Nuthall, leads teachers to avoid seriously following up on whether all students have actually learned what's being taught. It allows teachers to teach, test, and move on with the curriculum. It allows them to ignore the fact that learning is complex and takes place inside and outside the classroom over an extended period of time. And it ignores the amount of forgetting that's constantly taking place.

Nuthall says that these myths are so persistent because they are sustained by (a) teacher education (where novices are inculcated with these beliefs by their professors and mentor teachers), (b) much of the academic research (which looks at processes and not learning results), and (c) the way in which teachers are supervised and evaluated. On the third, Nuthall has this to say: "When administrators evaluate a teacher's classroom performance, their judgments are primarily based on identifying the effective enactment of the ritualized routines of the busy, active classroom. These are the routines they understand, believe in, and expect to see. Teachers whose students play the reciprocal roles enthusiastically and with evident commitment are the teachers who are given awards for the quality of their teaching. Other teachers are invited to watch and copy what these award-winning teachers do."

Nuthall's research has found that students don't learn unless they are truly *engaged* in classroom activities: "their performance is a function of their interest, motivation, and understanding of the purposes and beliefs of the teacher and/or tester." And here Nuthall makes his most subtle and devastating point: "The result is that ability tests are highly correlated with school achievement tests (and with the kinds of work that students produce in class) not because of the role that ability is supposed to play in the learning process, but because scores on both ability and achievement tests are determined by interests and motivational and cultural factors. The high correlations between ability and achievement tests are, in a sense, a measure of the relative ineffectiveness of teachers at managing classroom learning."

"The Cultural Myths and Realities of Classroom Teaching and Learning: A Personal Journey" by Graham Nuthall in *Teachers College Record*, May 2005 (Vol. 107, #5, p. 895-934), no e-link available

2. Leadership Essentials for New Principals

New principals are constantly distracted, says this *Educational Leadership* article. "It is a tough balancing act... to keep improvement of classroom instruction as the center of the job while being barraged with administrative tasks." To keep the focus

on instruction and student learning, novices need to constantly ask themselves: “Will this action help or hurt students? What message will my action send to the staff concerning the importance of student learning? Is my action supporting a professional learning community?”

A faculty will quickly pick up on a new principal’s priorities. Does the principal focus on student success by engaging teachers in discussing student achievement data, celebrating exemplary student presentations, and displaying high-quality student work in the office? Does academic achievement get at least equal billing with athletic prowess? Do displays convey the message: Student work is at the heart of this school’s success?

Among the article’s other suggestions for novice principals:

- *Be a learning leader.* This includes admitting sometimes that you don’t have all the answers. This encourages staff members to take risks, share, engage in constructive criticism, and think outside the box. In this kind of culture, teachers might feel able to say in the teachers’ room, “Ouch, I just presented a lesson that bombed! Can you help me figure out what happened?”

- *Act ethically.* “To act ethically and with integrity,” write the authors, “some principals need to make the bold and sometimes agonizing decisions necessary to relieve a school of the few teachers who do not serve the needs of students.”

- *Put instructional leadership first.* This includes supporting new teachers, celebrating the contributions of veteran staff, aligning standards and assessments, sharing articles and books with teachers and taking part in study groups, encouraging critical friends groups, lesson study, and action research.

- *Practice efficient management.* This means keeping the building safe, making sure bathrooms are sanitary and free of graffiti, providing comfortable desks and chairs for students and teachers, providing instructional supplies, and mastering the budget. It also involves being “out and about” to greet students and monitor the operation of the building.

- *Build strong relationships.* Trust is a two-way street, and principals earn trust by their actions and their faith in the skills and competence of staff members. The authors write: “On difficult days, wise principals find inner balance by taking a moment to tie a kindergartner’s shoelace or seeking out a high-school student to compliment her on the fantastic violin solo she performed during the holiday concert. Principals need and enjoy these moments of celebration as much as students and teachers do.”

- *Know what to expect.* New principals go through stages, wondering at every point if they are the only ones having these experiences. “[N]ew principals should come to school each day with the attitude that nothing on the job will be a surprise and that they accept responsibility for all events.”

- *Orchestrate school-community partnerships.* Effective school leaders reach out for community help – from families, service agencies, public organizations, and private businesses – and are open to traditional and non-traditional partnerships.

All these components interact: “[P]rincipals who act in an ethical manner will find it easier to attract community partners. Principals who admit that they don’t have all the answers take a positive step toward establishing trusting relationships with parents and teachers. Principals who ensure safe and comfortable facilities and adequate instructional materials contribute to a healthy, learning-centered culture.”

“Growing Into Leadership” by Harvey Alvy and Pam Robbins in *Educational Leadership*, May 2005 (Vol. 62, #8, p. 50-54), no e-link available

3. Fixing a Toxic School Climate

This *American School Board Journal* article summarizes research and recommendations for building positive school climate:

- *Support new teachers.* The price of teacher turnover is high in terms of productivity and morale, not to mention money (it costs about \$50,000 to recruit, hire, and prepare a new teacher). Induction, training, and a structured mentoring program are vital, as well as ongoing, tangible support on what’s going well and what needs to be done better.

- *Address a toxic climate.* Wisconsin professor Kent Peterson suggests this checklist for diagnosing a school’s climate:

- What is the energy level of people coming into the school? Do they look positive and energized?
- What underlying message is being sent about what’s important in the school?
- At faculty meetings, what do people talk about? Do they only discuss their problems, or do they believe they can solve those problems?
- Is there a sense of collaboration?

In a toxic culture, hostility and conflict among teachers are a constant; rumormongers pass on negative information, and they only talk about things that don’t work.

Peterson suggests that principals in such schools reach out to a core of staff members who believe in the school and build from there, confronting negativity and hostility

and slowly turning the culture around. He also recommends involving the staff in making sure that fun and celebration are part of each school year. "It's really hard to be a teacher," says Joe Ruzicka, principal of Capital High School in Boise, Idaho. "We have to work hard and play hard." He split his staff into four groups and challenged them to come up with celebrations and fun activities, and now they have annual staff picnics at the beginning and end of the school year with families invited, among several other "down-time" staff activities.

- *Empower teachers and staff.* Autocratic, top-down leadership creates ill will and drives teachers out, especially young teachers. It's wise to give teachers a greater role in decisions that affect them and listen to their input on a variety of issues.

- *Recognize and reward teachers and staff.* This includes everything from following up on positive things observed during classroom visits to leaving encouraging notes and candy in teachers' mailboxes.

- *Deal with student discipline.* Firm, consistent rules, clear direction to teachers, and supportive redirection when necessary are all important to staff climate and teacher morale.

- *Treat teachers like professionals.* Teachers need time to collaborate with their colleagues and escape from isolation, and should be encouraged to see themselves as intellectuals and researchers, discovering solutions to thorny classroom problems, writing, and presenting at conferences.

- *Ask staff members what's going on.* Gathering input is vital to knowing what's going on and heading off morale problems. This can occur in informal chats, regular feedback meetings, and anonymous surveys.

- *Keep facilities tidy.* The state of the school building definitely affects morale; leaky roofs, broken plumbing, and dirty corridors make teachers feel that their work isn't valued.

- *Develop emotional IQ.* "Everyone needs to feel emotional support from the person they work for," says Daniel Goleman, the journalist who coined the term emotional intelligence. "Being empathetic, recognizing and appreciating good work, validating efforts, appreciating a well-done job, helping people develop new strengths. All of these things are what good leaders do to help teachers work at their best."

"Climate Control: Ten Ways to Make Your Schools Great Places to Work and Learn" by Kathleen Vail in *American School Board Journal*, June 2005 (Vol. 192, #6, p. 16-19), no e-link available

4. Fostering Collaboration Between Two Generations of Teachers

This thoughtful *Educational Leadership* article by Susan Moore Johnson and Susan Kardos asserts that the impending retirement of many veteran teachers and the amount of turnover among many new teachers threaten to disrupt the momentum of schoolwide improvement efforts. To prevent this from happening, Johnson and Kardos believe that schools need to become more flexible and collaborative workplaces, greatly increasing communication across the generation gap between two very different cadres of teachers.

The retiring generation is relatively uniform, having entered teaching directly from traditional university programs with the expectation of working in the classroom long-term. New teachers are far more diverse; they include first-career and mid-career entrants, some prepared as undergraduates, some in alternative programs, most not planning to stay in teaching for more than a few years. Johnson and Kardos believe that better communication between this bimodal population of teachers will cut down on attrition in both groups and ensure that veteran teachers are able to “bestow a legacy of skills and knowledge on the school and on their successors” before they ride off into the sunset. They suggest several ways for school leaders to accomplish this:

- *Treat the hiring process as the first step of induction.* Hire new teachers as early as possible and have veteran teachers give them as much information as possible, thus increasing novices’ understanding and veteran teachers’ investment in them.

- *Place new teachers in teams alongside experienced teachers.* Don’t leave the placement of new teachers to chance; make sure they teach in teams with veteran teachers so they can learn from them (and vice-versa).

- *Schedule time for new and veteran teachers to meet.* These mixed teacher teams need time to share ideas, observe each other, and give feedback.

- *Mentoring is not enough.* Johnson and Kardos say the research shows that one-to-one mentoring often fails because of inappropriate matches, not enough mentors, and lack of mentor training. In addition, they write, “having a mentor has no statistical relationship to new teachers’ job satisfaction, whereas working in a school with an integrated professional culture is strongly and positively related to job satisfaction.” They cite a recent study that found that appropriate mentoring and a comprehensive induction program is a good combination.

- *Have experienced teachers lead school-based induction programs.* These programs should focus on the school, not the district (which is of less interest to new teachers), and are best run by veteran teachers, drawing on their own experience and that of

their colleagues. In one Massachusetts high school, two veteran teachers are released from one class a day to carry out their induction responsibilities, meeting with 35 new teachers, visiting classrooms, and being observed themselves.

- *Organize ongoing professional development on the curriculum.* Curriculum briefings are too often one-shot affairs. Johnson and Kardos say that on-going sessions focusing on reflection and adaptation are essential, and should ideally be run by veteran teachers.

- *Encourage teacher leadership and differentiated roles.* Many new teachers look forward to taking on other types of roles in schools as their careers unfold, including instructional coach, curriculum coordinator, cluster leader, department head, or induction coordinator. Having these roles up and running in schools not only provides invaluable support for new teachers in their early years on the job but also serves as an incentive for staying in schools and being energized and productive over the years.

“Bridging the Generation Gap” by Susan Moore Johnson and Susan Kardos in *Educational Leadership*, May 2005 (Vol. 62, #8, p. 8-14),

http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.MAXIMIZE/menuitem.459dee008f99653fb85516f762108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journaltypeheaderimage=%2FASCD%2Fimages%2Fmultifiles%2Fpublications%2Felmast.gif&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_view/D=article_view&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalmoid=e27d51e5ccaa3010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_articlemoid=5b9d51e5ccaa3010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalTypePersonalization=ASCD_EL&javax.portlet.beginCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token

5. Common Space, Common Time, Common Work in a High School

This article by education professor Melody Shank describes how newly-constructed Poland Regional High School in Maine has made a point of not assigning teachers to classrooms that they “own.” Rather, teachers in the same department are given desks in a shared space and carry their materials with them when they go to teach in different classrooms. This arrangement, combined with common planning time and a mandate to collaborate on curriculum units, has led to a much greater level of communication and collaboration around curriculum, pedagogy, interim assessment results, logistics, and professional learning. In Shank’s words: “The office space provides a protected yet public place where teachers can express frustrations about teaching, share successes and challenges, learn new ideas, and envision possibilities.”

Who sits with whom in these common faculty rooms? Co-teaching teams, cross-curricular grade-level teams, and content-area teachers are clustered together; this means that teachers who teach the same grade level can easily consult one

another as issues arise, and teachers who teach the same courses can sit together as they plan units and lessons. In the process, veteran teachers help novice teachers. Sharing these spaces makes it far easier for rookies to learn the norms and practices of the school and of their profession. As one new teacher remarked, “It wasn’t like I had my own classroom and had to knock on someone else’s door and say, ‘Can you look at this?’ or ‘What do you think of this?’ I just leaned over [and asked for help].”

Poland Regional has invested heavily in professional meeting time. Teachers have 15 professional development days built into the school calendar, weekly faculty meetings, and more than 13 hours each week for planning. Teachers use the planning time for individual and team collaboration on instruction.

Shank notes that it’s possible for teachers to have common workspace and common planning time and yet still work alone. To counteract this tendency, the principal has structured several ways in which teachers must work together:

- *Standards-based assessment* – Teachers of common classes and grade levels work together to clarify grade-level and course learning expectations and create or choose common assessments. Students are graded on these common expectations on a schoolwide three-point scale: competent, advanced, and distinguished.

- *Advisory groups* – Each teacher advises a group of 10-12 students throughout their four years at the high school. At each grade level, advisory groups have a specific task:

- Freshmen design their personal growth plan;
- Sophomores prepare their core portfolio;
- Juniors do career planning, job shadowing, and community service;
- Seniors choose an inquiry focus and present projects in a final exhibition.

Advisors for each grade level meet monthly to coordinate these projects.

- *Grade-level teams* – Ninth and tenth grade students are grouped in teams of 60-80 students. Five teachers (science, math, social studies, English, and special education) work together to craft an integrated academic experience for their students and support each other on classroom management and logistics.

- *Integrated curriculum* – Social studies and English teachers work to integrate the two disciplines as they plan curriculum units and assessments from grade 9 to 11.

Shank concludes by noting that in its hiring process, Poland Regional looks for teachers who have the skills and desire to work closely with colleagues: “Learning to teach in this kind of collaborative environment requires that teachers accept the organizational demands of sharing rooms and carting materials back and forth

between office and classroom and that they are respectful of other teachers' needs for quiet time and individual space within common work areas. The school also recognizes that teachers need to develop their own identities and voices as strong, independent practitioners even as they hone their collaborative skills."

"Common Space, Common Time, Common Work" by Melody Shank in *Educational Leadership*, May 2005 (Vol. 62, #8, p. 8-14), no e-link available

6. Are We Setting Up New Teachers for Failure?

This strongly-worded article by Mary Peterson, a California teacher, describes the way many high schools assign novice teachers to the most difficult grade levels, course loads, and students. Here are the elements that she believes can spell disaster for a new teacher:

- Teaching more than two preps;
- Teaching mainly 9th-grade courses in schools in which these are the most challenging courses;
- Teaching mainly entry-level courses (e.g., Spanish I, Algebra I);
- Teaching in more than one classroom;
- Teaching new courses without a developed curriculum;
- Getting hired late;
- Holding substandard credentials or teaching out of subject;
- Not getting enough books for students;
- Teaching in a classroom isolated from department colleagues;
- Being evaluated late in the school year;
- Being asked to run time-consuming clubs;
- Not being represented on decision-making committees.

Peterson describes her principal's surprise when she pointed out the assignment patterns in her own school (he got to work making changes), and offers this advice to other principals:

- Avoid hiring new teachers at the last minute or after the school year has begun.
- Create survivable schedules for new teachers by giving them one classroom, no more than two preps, and a mix of freshman and higher-level courses.
- Foster a supportive environment by locating new teachers' classrooms near those of helpful veteran teachers in their department.
- Provide new teachers with curriculum binders that hold sample lesson plans, quizzes, and homework assignments.

- Provide new teachers with adequate books and materials for their students.
- Give new teachers concrete information on departmental standards, expectations, and timelines.

“Hazed” by Mary Peterson in *Educational Leadership*, May 2005 (Vol. 62, #8, p. 20-23)

http://www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/template.MAXIMIZE/menuitem.459dee008f99653fb85516f762108a0c/?javax.portlet.tpst=d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_ws_MX&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journaltypeheaderimage=%2FASCD%2Fimages%2Fmultifiles%2Fpublications%2Felmast.gif&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_viewI D=article_view&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalmoid=e27d51e5ccaa3010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_articlemoid=9bbd51e5ccaa3010VgnVCM1000003d01a8c0RCRD&javax.portlet.prp_d5b9c0fa1a493266805516f762108a0c_journalTypePersonalization=ASCD_EL&javax.portlet.begCacheTok=token&javax.portlet.endCacheTok=token

7. Staunching the Loss of New Teachers in Philadelphia

This article describes the impressive effort by the Philadelphia Public Schools to prevent new teachers from bolting from the district: the number of first-year teachers who completed their first year rose from 73 percent to 91 percent between 2002-03 and 2003-04. This is a turnaround from the dismal recent history (fewer than half of new teachers were staying more than three years). Although there is still lots of work to be done, it’s worth looking at what caused this improvement. When he began as Philadelphia CEO in 2002, Paul Vallas made teacher retention a major priority, appointing a top-level staffer to spearhead the effort and providing significant new resources. Key elements in the strategy:

- *Recruiting stronger teachers* – Philadelphia worked on getting qualified teachers who are likely to stay in the system. The number of applicants increased by 44 percent because of these steps: an aggressive marketing effort; outreach to local colleges of education; follow-up to applicants to show the district’s interest in them; a streamlined application process; more hiring power at the school level to ensure better matches; tuition reimbursements for new teachers pursuing a master’s degree (\$2,400 a year for teachers in hard-to-staff schools and \$1,000 a year for those in other schools); \$1,000 awards for “teacher ambassadors” – teachers who recruit new candidates into high-need areas; a \$1,000 stipend and partial reimbursement of the Praxis exam fees for student teachers who sign on as teachers; a hiring bonus of \$4,500 for new teachers, paid in two installments over three years; Teach for America; and six alternative certification programs in local colleges for teachers working on emergency certifications.

- *Supporting new teachers* – Once hired, new teachers are getting better support, including smaller class sizes in the primary grades, improved facilities, and tightening up of student discipline. New teachers are required to attend a paid two-week summer orientation, provided a structured curriculum, and offered an after-school

New Teacher Academy run by Teachers College, Columbia. In addition, the district has hired 61 teacher coaches (retired or reassigned teachers) who provide mentoring and in-class help to new teachers (the ratio is 20 to 1). Teachers are paired up with a coach whose grade level and subject-matter expertise matches their own. Coaches help new teachers by helping them set up their rooms, finding scarce classroom materials, suggesting new resources, modeling lessons, observing classes and giving feedback, and providing emotional support and advice.

Finally, principals are being trained on effective way to retain new teachers, required to write a retention plan, and held accountable by making retention of new teachers part of their performance appraisal.

“Supporting New Teachers in the City” by Elizabeth Useem and Ruth Curran Neild in *Educational Leadership*, May 2005 (Vol. 62, #8, p. 44-47), no e-link available

8. Why Is the Math Club 94 Percent Asian?

New York Times education columnist Michael Winerip recently saw a photo of the math club at the public high school he attended in Quincy, Massachusetts, a blue-collar community south of Boston. Although the school is less than a quarter Asian, the math club is 94.4% students from Thailand, Vietnam, and China. Winerip decided to probe beyond the conventional “wisdom” that Asian students are naturally smart at math and see what was going on.

He found that many of the students in the math club had arrived in the United States just a few years earlier speaking little or no English. Unlike many high schools, whose math placement tests contain word problems, the placement test given by Quincy High to immigrant students is all numbers. This has given Asian students who were struggling to learn English an area in which they could excel. “I feel my confidence from math,” said Chaoran Xie, a junior from China.

Math department head Evelyn Ryan formed the math club in 1999 at the suggestion of a student, and it now has 19 members, all but one Asian, meeting for 90 minutes every Monday. The math club has become the de facto social club for this group of Asian students, who tend not to take part in other extracurricular activities. The one non-Asian student, Dhimiter Kondili, is from Albania and doesn’t consider himself white. Asked why more white students aren’t in the club, he said, “Whites play a lot of sports. They take math, but they want to get it over with.”

In math club meetings, Ryan allows students to work in homeland groups and speak in their native languages as they solve the problems she assigns them, but at the

end, they have to explain and defend their solutions in English. “Math is a universal language,” says Ryan. “Even if they don’t get the right answer, you can tell by the way they work it through, what they know. We have kids, they don’t speak a word of English but they’re ready for pre-calculus. I put them right in where they can succeed.” The track record of math club students getting into good colleges is impressive. Sixin Lu, who originally suggested the math club, was admitted to Cal Tech in 2003, and other students are in M.I.T., Tufts, and Stanford, as well as lesser-known colleges.

Ryan rejects the notion that Asian students are naturally smarter at math, citing the number of Asian students in the school who don’t excel at math. She believes that the achievement of her top Asian students is due partly to the way math is prized and encouraged in Asian culture – and partly to the hard work of her top students. Says Vu Chu, who arrived from Vietnam two years ago, “It’s really an exciting activity. It’s like proving you’re smart.” It’s clear that the reason these students gravitate to math club is that it’s their best shot to excel in a new land.

“For Immigrants, Math Is a Way to Success” by Michael Winerip in the *New York Times*, May 18, 2005 (p. 19); the link has a photo of the math club:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/18/education/18education.html>?

9. Short Items:

a. Progress on teen sex – The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recently reported the following statistics on teen sexual activity as of 2002:

- 46% of boys 15-17 reported having had sexual intercourse (it was 55% in 1995).
- 30% of girls 15-17 reported having had sexual intercourse (it was 38% in 1995).
- There were similar declines in kids under 15.
- 79% of those having sexual intercourse said they used condoms (61% in 1980s).
- These positive trends resulted in a striking decrease in teen pregnancy.
- However, 10% of girls described the first time they had sex as “nonvoluntary.”

“Sex and the Single Teen” in *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 2005 (p. 50), no e-link available. From “Teenagers in the United States: Sexual Activity, Contraceptive Use, and Childbearing, 2002” by J.C. Abma, G.M. Martinez, W.D. Mosher, and B.S. Dawson, CDCP.

b. Websites for supporting new teachers – Educational Leadership lists the following websites as resources for new teacher induction and support:

- <http://www.teachers.net> - This network of 50,000 educators around the world allows teachers to chat by e-mail or in live chat rooms on specific topics, share lesson plans and photos, and search job listings.
- <http://www.teachersnetwork.org> - Similar to the website above, plus it has the New Teachers Helpline with expert answers within 72 hours to questions on ELL students, technology, and standards.
- <http://www.newteachercenter.org> - Based at UC Santa Cruz, this site has support for new teacher and administrator induction.
- <http://www.btsa.ca.gov> - The Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program is designed for first- and second-year teachers, supporting them by using ongoing assessment to learn effective teaching practices.
- http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/teacherinduction/#1 - This paper, "More Swimming, Less Sinking: Perspectives on Teacher Induction in the U.S. and Abroad" showcases effective strategies to support new teachers in China, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland, California, and Connecticut.

"Supporting New Educators" by Rick Allen in *Educational Leadership*, May 2005 (Vol. 62, #8, p. 96)

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Do you have feedback? Is anything missing?

If you have comments or suggestions, if you saw an article or web item in the last week that you think should have been summarized, or if you would like to suggest additional publications that should be covered by the Marshall Memo, please e-mail: kim.marshall8@verizon.net

About the Marshall Memo

Mission and focus:

This weekly memo is designed to keep principals, teachers, superintendents, and others very well-informed on current research and best practices in K-12 education. Kim Marshall, drawing on 35 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 39 carefully-chosen publications (see list to the right), sifts through scores of 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, provide e-links to full articles when available, and e-mails the memo to subscribers every Monday (with occasional breaks; there were 50 issues in 2003-04).

Subscriptions:

Individual subscriptions are \$50 for the school year (\$25 for a half-year, beginning late January). 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.

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

- How to subscribe or renew
- Why the Marshall Memo?
- Focus topics
- Headlines for issues 1-68
- What readers say
- About Kim Marshall
- A free sample issue

Subscribers have access to the Members' Area of the website, which has:

- 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, article headline, source, article title, author, and level
- How to change access e-mail or password

Publications covered:

(those read this week are underlined)

American Educational Research Journal
American Educator
American School Board Journal
ASCD SmartBrief
Atlantic Monthly
Bay State Banner
Boston Globe
CommonWealth Magazine
District Administration
Ed. Magazine (Harvard School of Education)
Education Digest
Education Gadfly
Education Next
Education Update (ASCD)
Education Week
Educational Leadership
Educational Researcher
Edutopia
Elementary School Journal
Harper's
Harvard Business Review
Harvard Education Letter
Harvard Educational Review
Journal of Staff Development
Middle School Journal
NASSP Bulletin
New York Times
New Yorker
Newsweek
PEN Weekly NewsBlast
Phi Delta Kappan
Principal Magazine
Principal Leadership
Psychology Today
Reading Research Quarterly
Reading Today
Rethinking Schools
Review of Educational Research
Teachers College Record
Teacher Magazine

E-links will be provided whenever possible.