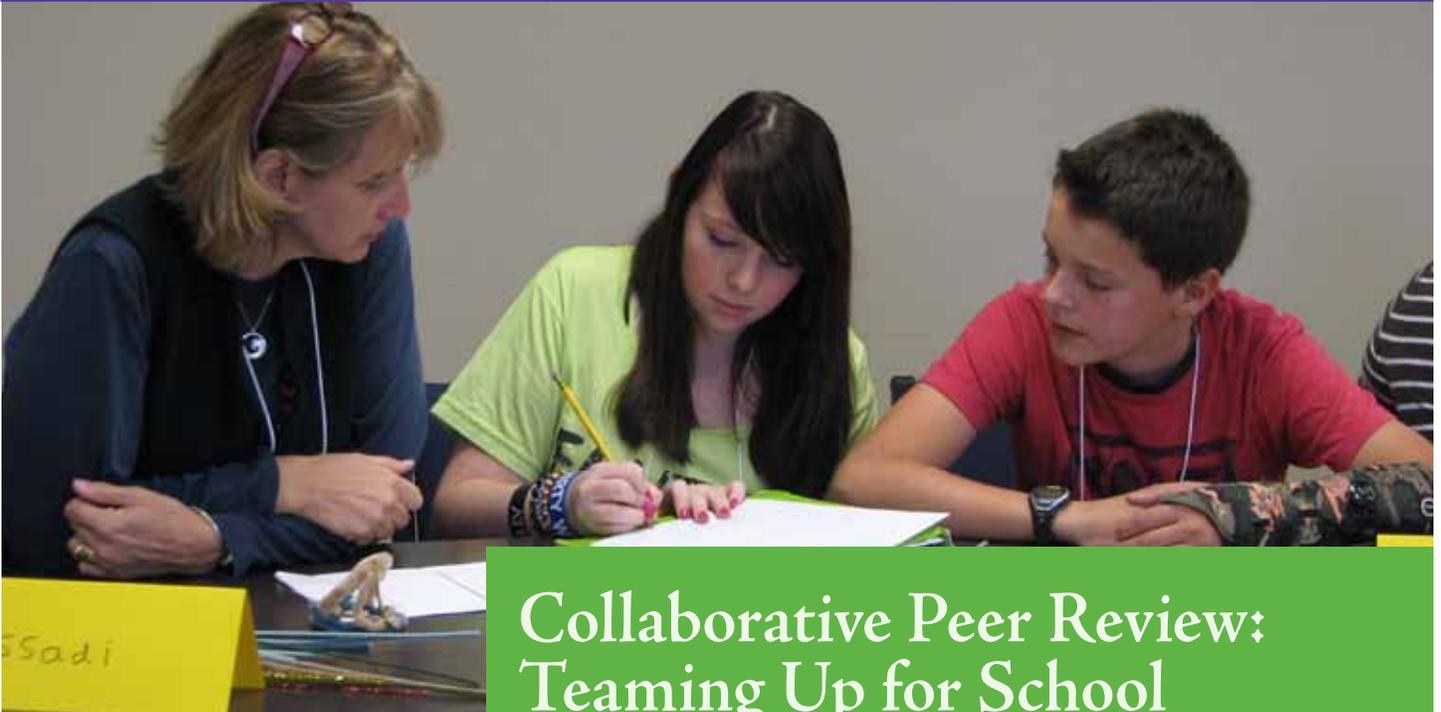


UP for Learning

Summer 2014 Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning



Collaborative Peer Review: Teaming Up for School Reflection and Growth



Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning

Our Mission

Increase student engagement by developing youth-adult partnerships in learning to ensure that each and every student has the skills, self-confidence, and opportunities to assume meaningful roles in shaping their learning and their lives.

Our Vision

We envision a time when students will take responsibility for their own learning by collaborating with adults to reach their own goals.

“What’s needed to continue improving teaching and learning at our school?” Last year, three school leaders posed this fundamental question and came up with a bold new answer. Instead of participating in a traditional evaluation and accreditation program (the NEASC system offered by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges) they would collaborate to design their own model. Inspired by experience with YATST and UP for Learning, they decided to put youth-adult partnership at the center of the process. That led them to bring in Helen Beattie and Martha Rich as consultants. The result was a whole new approach to continuing school improvement, combining peer review, reflection, and dialogue within a youth-adult structure of shared responsibility.

The three pioneering high schools in this new initiative are Leland and Gray in Townshend, Mill River Union in Clarendon, and Otter Valley Union in Brandon. In the coming year, they will participate in a project-based course called Collaborative Peer Review: Reflection through Youth-Adult Observation and Dialogue. Like the innovative Communicating School Redesign course, this study will engage youth-adult teams as partners in learning. Castleton State College will offer graduate credit for educators and dual enrollment (high school and college) credit for students. Each school will recruit four students,

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Communicating School Redesign Goes Statewide

Little did we know that when we kicked off our “Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens” (CSR) course last fall, we would be seeding a statewide Act 77 communications effort, in partnership with the AOE, this coming year! Youth-adult teams from S. Burlington High School-Big Picture (SBHS), Harwood, Peoples Academy (PA) and Hazen Union enrolled in this innovative course because they were all committed to creating school readiness for Personalized Learning Plans (PLPs), a change that requires a strong communications strategy. Jane Feinberg of Full Frame Communications, a nationally known communications expert, provided a research-based road map for this work. UP for Learning was at the ready to support the journey with expertise in youth-adult partnership and dialogue for change.

Harwood was strengthening their Teacher Advisory system to ensure that each student would have a strong relationship with an adult to craft individual PLPs in the future. The S.B.H.S. and Peoples Academy teams were introducing proficiency-based graduation and grading strategies, so that PLPs can be aligned with these community-generated overarching goals and assessment practices. Hazen was working with the supervisory union staff to introduce faculty to the core concepts of Act 77 and flexible pathways. All the teams were appreciative of the direction and support offered them in this course (adults receiving masters level credit, high school students receiving dual enrollment credit), as they took on the challenging roles of change agents in their schools.

In a fall exploratory conversation with Vermont’s Deputy Commissioner of Education John Fisher and Agency of Education (AOE) Act 77 coordinator Debi Price, the need surfaced for a statewide approach to communicating this new legislation, mirroring our course efforts. In the ensuing early winter months, a partnership was formed between Full Frame Communications, UP for Learning, and The School Project Foundation (SPF), to craft a Vermont communications implementation plan. Funding commitments from the Nellie Mae Educational Foundation, the Bay and Paul Foundations, and the AOE were secured. The Vermont School Board Association joined as a strong collaborator due to the fact that this work supports their “Vision for a World Class Education.”

The CSR course will once again anchor statewide efforts, with the added expertise of Daniel Baron from the SPF, an expert in training youth and adults in responsive fa-

ilitation/dialogue strategies. Daniel is well known to YATST participants who have joined his two-day youth facilitation seminars each fall in Vermont. One student this year declared that “the training with him changed my life!”

This spring, through a competitive grant process, four new schools received AOE support to be part of this second wave of training and communications development: Colchester High School, Otter Valley High School, Twinfield Union, and Champlain Valley Union High School. Two of this year’s CSR schools, Harwood and Hazen Union, will be funded to continue their work through the Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together initiative, creating a two-year capacity building aspect in this evolving model. Efforts will be documented and evaluated collaboratively by the AOE and Pennsylvania State University.

This will be the first statewide communications effort of this depth and breadth in the nation. It will include young people in all phases of its evolution, moving youth-adult partnership to the heart of current school remodeling efforts statewide. The process of doing our work will be as important as the products and outcomes produced. In this, UP for Learning continues its commitment to Gandhi’s precept: “The means are the ends in action.”



Daniel Baron

Lights, Camera... Partnership!

Evidence of the power of this partnership can be heard through the reflections of CSR course participants on a new YouTube video, “The Youth-Adult Learning Partnership: A New Course Model.” View it at tinyurl.com/YA-Course2.

Reflections on the School Redesign Course

The content of this course should be required for all the AOE and school leaders. For schools to change in the way they need to, they need to be able to communicate with the outside world well; these are the strategies to do that effectively.

—Jason Cushner, Big Picture program director at South Burlington High School



Learning together really helps tighten the bond between the youth and adults. I find that I am more empowered to let my voice be heard and to want the feedback from my fellow classmates — more so in this class than any I have ever had before.

— Audrey Barnett, student at Hazen Union

In a way, [youth] need to be mentoring us as much as we're mentoring them. They're coming from a different place; they were born in the late '90s, and they have an important perspective. I like that idea about reverse mentorships.

— Carrie Felice, guidance counselor at Peoples Academy



Statewide Communications Seminar



The Williamstown YATST team arm-wrestles for M&Ms, moving from “I” to “we.”

Youth-adult teams from 13 Vermont high schools attended this participatory morning seminar in Montpelier in May. The morning was co-facilitated by Jane Feinberg (Full Frame Communications) and the youth and adult participants in Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens, a yearlong credit-bearing course. Jane Feinberg is a nationally recognized communications expert and the course co-instructor. Participants were introduced to Strategic Framing, a communications approach that combines the power of storytelling with evidence-based strategies that build public awareness and understanding. School teams created a Public Service Announcement (PSA) introducing school redesign to their communities. Throughout the morning they worked on their PSAs incorporating the new information they were learning about the strategic framing approach to communications. Participants in the communications course were also able to showcase some of the tools they developed throughout the year using strategic framing and messaging the “why” of school redesign. Using the KIVA protocol course participants were able to reflect on their own learning experiences and the importance of partnership. The morning seminar was filmed and live streamed by ORCA Media.

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two teachers, an administrator, and a community member to attend trainings and a series of two-day school observation visits from August 2014 to March 2015. Helen, Martha, and a team of experienced YATST students will serve as instructors. The Blue Mountain Union YATST group prepared for this role throughout the past year, working with Martha to develop specialized training in classroom observation skills.

The schools will use three data sources in their improvement efforts: direct observation of teaching and learning, YATST survey data, and faculty reflection using the Global Best Practices framework from the New England Secondary School Consortium. Rather than relying on visiting committees sent by an outside agency, the three schools will send visiting teams to each other. Teams will learn to use structured observation methods, including the Data-in-a-Day model featured at last fall’s UP for Learning conference. School visits will generate multiple sources of insight and reflection for the host school.

When data collection is complete, the three school teams will meet in November to analyze and synthesize the initial findings. Mill River principal Andy Pomeroy emphasizes that this process, in contrast to the NEASC evaluation system, is not about outsiders making judgments. “We want to use observations to gather data,” he says—and then trust the school communities to make their own meaning from those findings. That means sharing data with facilitation strategies tailored to the task.

As Leland and Gray principal Dorinne Dorfman notes, “school evaluation cannot be effective without communication,” so teams will learn new tools for presenting the data and facilitating discussions with a range of groups: school boards, parents, faculty/staff, and students. Following this process, teams will share the results in various forums in order to influence decision-making throughout the school community.

The three school teams will meet a final time in March to discuss progress and reflect on the process. Veteran Vermont education leader Bob McNamara will use the teams’ reflections to prepare a summative report for each school at the end of the year. UP for Learning has engaged researchers Dr. Dana Mitra and Catharine Biddle of Pennsylvania State University to conduct an independent evaluation of the initiative.

Leaders at the three pilot schools hope their vision for collaborative peer review will lead to a sustainable process at their own sites. They’ll also be pleased if their innovative approach helps other schools meet provisions of the 2014 Education Quality Standards, but they’re not simply responding to new regulations. “This is not just an act of compliance,” says Otter Valley principal Jim Avery. “It’s a commitment to best practice. We’re doing this because we believe it’s the right thing to do.”

Thanks to Dorinne Dorfman for her contributions to the writing of this article.



SRI Winter Meeting

YATST continues to push the envelope in advocating for students to develop facilitation expertise as change agents in their schools and communities. In January, YATST representatives from Hazen, Harwood, and Craftsbury co-facilitated a workshop titled Youth as Facilitators with Helen Beattie and Daniel Baron (of the Project School Foundation) at the School Reform Initiative (SRI) Winter Meeting in Boston. The workshop encouraged adult participants to explore their assumptions and preconceived notions about the capacity of youth to be co-facilitators of learning and school change. YATST students took a lead role in demonstrating a wide variety of protocols for youth to use in the school context; they also facilitated small group discussion. A short film was also premiered at the workshop, documenting a fall YATST Facilitator Training that demonstrated the capacity of young people as able facilitators.

Pictured above: the facilitation team and UP for Learning team. From left: Sally McCarthy, Asah Whalen, Fred Bay, Dylan McAllister, Carrie Edson, Carina and Adriana Eldred, Karl Stein, Daniel Baron, Helen Beattie, Martha Rich, Ema Spiese, Ellen Berrings and Erin Dezell.

It humbles me to know that there are students as well as teachers who share the same goal as me. I don't feel alone any longer.

—participant reflection from the School Reform Initiative meeting

Check out the following new resources!

The Youth-Adult Partnership: A New Course Model video: <http://tinyurl.com/YA-Course2>

The Story of Great Expectations training video: <http://tinyurl.com/LB-overview>

Getting to 'Y' overview video: <http://tinyurl.com/GTY-Overview>

Getting to 'Y' training video: <http://tinyurl.com/GTY-Training>

Getting to 'Y' Dialogue Night with the Georgia Middle School: <http://tinyurl.com/GTY-Dialogue2>

Great Expectations in Middle School

Catherine (Cat) Biddle, Penn State Doctoral student, completed an evaluation of the Story of Great Expectations initiative as it was piloted in six Vermont middle schools. The Great Expectations initiative, now in its third year, was originally created for high school youth and has been rolled out in five high schools in the past two years. This year UP redesigned the program for the middle level. Cat's findings are based on case studies following three participating schools. She found that the Great Expectations training day was a success. The concept of "mindset" and influence of expectations on one's learning made a significant impression on the student participants while the adults emphasised that their greatest learning from the day was "student leadership is integral and needed."

This evaluation confirmed the belief that middle school students are ready learn how the brain learns. It also brought to light that middle school students may not yet be ready to act as messengers of this work. Taking guidance from this evaluation, UP will be moving the Great Expectations initiative back to high school, encouraging school teams to include the middle school as integral partners in promoting growth mindsets.

YATST Spot­lighted at International Education Conference

Vermont’s effort to elevate student involvement in learning and school decision-making was featured at the recent American Education Research Association (AERA) annual meeting in Philadelphia. Helen co-presented on a panel titled The Roles of Student Voice, Participation and Youth-Adult Partnership in Promoting Student Development. She was joined by Catharine Biddle of Pennsylvania State University, who authored the session paper along with Dr. Dana Mitra.

“It’s exciting to be sought out, and to share this complex work with researchers and schools on an international platform,” said Helen. The research paper will be readied and submitted for publication within the coming year. The American Education Research Association (AERA) is the nation’s premier conference on educational research.

“Few models of youth-adult partnership exist in the United States,” said Catharine Biddle, Doctoral Candidate at Pennsylvania State University. “YATST has one of the most sophisticated visions of this work.”



Working on the Getting to ‘Y’ chalktalk exercise.

Getting to ‘Y’ Partnership with the University of New Mexico

“Both youth and adult participants described their participation in the Getting to ‘Y’ program as nothing short of transformative. Youth facilitators described feeling newly empowered to make a difference in their schools and communities, while adult advisors reported that community members, administrators and teachers demonstrated revitalized interest in the Youth Risk Behavior Survey data with youth as the messengers of this information.”

—Pennsylvania State University Evaluation 2013–14

UP’s Getting to ‘Y’ initiative (Youth Bring Meaning to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey) was implemented in Vermont five years ago, in partnership with the Agency of Education. In the intervening years, half of Vermont’s high schools and 20 middle schools have mobilized youth teams to take a significant role in analyzing their own health data, sharing their findings with their communities and moving to action. UP is now partnering with the Vermont Department of Health to assist them in meeting their strategic plan priority to have all middle school students in Vermont taking an active role in shaping their school cultures.

UP’s Getting to ‘Y’ initiative was replicated in New Mexico during the 2012-13 academic year at a Native American school and large urban Hispanic school. Pre- and post-survey results revealed significant improvements in participants’ health literacy, community service, sense of self-efficacy, and civic attitude.

Over the past year, UP has been partnering with faculty at the University of New Mexico to revamp the manual that guides teams through the steps of the initiative. This “new and improved” guide will be customized to each respective state (New Mexico’s program is called RAPPS) and will be shared with all Vermont schools participating in Getting to ‘Y’ in the coming year. A site in North Carolina is also currently pursuing resources to replicate this model.

Plans are underway in Vermont to make more curriculum links to this rich project-based initiative at the middle school level, helping schools embed it within the core curriculum.

The Missing R: Shared Responsibility

For the past six years, Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST) teams throughout Vermont have been advocating for student-teacher partnership as the basis of the learning process. Their action research is grounded by the nationally recognized principles of Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships, commonly known as the “new three Rs.” In the early years, we added “partnership” as the fourth key element.

A fourth R emerged when Ian, a Twinfield student YATST member, questioned the term “partnership” in relation to the three Rs framework. Seeking both greater clarity and better alliteration, he asked: “Isn’t it really all about students and teachers each taking responsibility? Isn’t that the heart of the partnership thing?” Hence, the fourth R – shared Responsibility – became integral to our framework.

The 4 Rs serve as a common language that is both highly credible in the education realm and accessible to individuals of all ages. YATST has developed the means to conduct school-wide assessments of all 4 Rs. Each school has then charted their own subsequent actions based on their findings.

We have recently come to understand that this fourth R is not merely equal in weight to the basic three. Rather, shared Responsibility lies at the interface of rigor, relevance, and strong student-teacher relationships. This fourth R brings integrity to the other three key attributes of engaging learning.

We are entering into an era where students in Vermont will all be expected to have “Personalized Learning Plans” and take a more active role in their learning. It is clear that building school cultures infused with shared responsibility will be essential to realize this vision.



Introducing Our Director: Mary Whalen

We’re excited to welcome Mary Whalen as the director of UP for Learning as Helen assumes the role of executive director. Mary is a veteran high school history teacher who has worked extensively with student voice and participation as democratizing principles in her classroom. Working with her students, she has developed a diverse array of experiences in participatory action research projects both locally and nationally. Mary brings firsthand experience and professional passion to the question of how we create and nurture meaningful student partnership within our classrooms and schools. She holds a Masters in Education from the University of Vermont, and is also a recipient of a Rowland Fellowship for “Declaring Ourselves!”— an action research project concerning civic engagement in the 21st century. She has worked in collaboration with the Community Works Institute and been a member of the founding faculty for the Governor’s Institute in Education. At home Mary enjoys working with her horses, listening to live music, and hiking with her family, grateful for Vermont’s natural beauty.

UP in England: International Focus on Student Voice

Cambridge, England, once again served as a remarkable backdrop to a June gathering of student voice researchers and practitioners from 12 countries around the world. Helen was invited to co-present a workshop with Dr. Susan Groundwater-Smith from the University of Sydney, Australia, entitled “Building Bridges to Partnership: The Evolving Materials List.” This was Helen’s third time attending this seminar. “It has been an invaluable opportunity to network with like-minded researchers and practitioners from around the world,” she says. A public blog includes a wide array of posts from attendees: cambridgestudentvoiceseminars.wordpress.com/2014-seminar.



As the conference drew to a close, the research participants committed to authoring a book which unites research with field-based practices to build youth-

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The Hazen Union School team

Connections in All Directions

We extend a warm welcome to the **Green Mountain Union School**, who will be joining YATST this year. **Jeanie Phillips**, librarian, and **Ally Oswald**, guidance counselor, will be the adult YATST members bringing form to YATST as a credit-bearing course. Jeanie is a new Rowland Fellow and will be wrapping this initiative into her fellowship.



Dylan McAllister, a YATSTer from Hazen Union and talented YATST trainer (pictured at left with YATST friend Audrey Barnett), has secured a spot on the **Vermont State Board of Education** for the next two

years. “UP for Learning/YATST has inspired me to further my experiences in education. I am beyond honored to be appointed to this position,” said Dylan. “I believe that it is my responsibility to ensure that every student perspective is heard and represented.” Dylan will serve in a non-voting capacity for one year and become a voting member as a high school senior during his second year on the board. He joins YATSTer **Morgan MacIver** from Twinfield Union who has just completed her first year on the Vermont State Board of Education.

UP for Learning was asked to offer a student panel dis-

cussion about Act 77 at the 9th Annual **Transition and Career Planning Conference** sponsored by the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation on June 4. **Madison Houston** (Crossett Brook Middle School), **Matt Fisher** (Harwood Union), **Asah Whalen** (Harwood Union) and **Morgan MacIver** (Twinfield Union), shared their thoughts about this new legislation with 240 educators from throughout Vermont.

Mary Whalen and **Erin Dezell** introduced UP for Learning to the the **Middle Grades Institute at UVM** on June 25. During the morning meeting Erin gave a brief overview and history of UP for Learning and shared a video showcasing the Getting to ‘Y’ initiative. In a morning workshop Mary gave participants tools and strategies to incorporate brain-based teaching strategies into their classrooms, drawing on the YATST Great Expectations module.

For the past six years, UP for Learning’s **Getting to ‘Y’** initiative has been supported by the **Agency of Education** (AOE), through funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This grant source ended this fall due to shifting CDC grant priorities.

The **Vermont Department of Health** (VDH) has made



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increasing the percentage of middle schools that have received the Getting to 'Y' training one of the department's Healthy Vermonters 2020 performance measures. Due to their advocacy for middle school involvement and matching grant to schools to cover half of the cost for participation, the number of schools participating in GTY this year increased significantly. The AOE continues to advocate for high school and middle school involvement in this initiative through existing prevention efforts. Participating schools recount the story of this year's work in the GTY newsletter: tinyurl.com/GTY-2014.

[The one thing I liked most today was] the information that I learned about how to make my school community a better environment, one in which everyone feels safe and can learn.

— student reflection from
the October GTY workshop

Helen and Erin went to Massachusetts to attend the **New England Secondary School Consortium Annual Conference this spring**. At the conference, titled High School Redesign in Action, they gathered information on school redesign throughout New England.

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adult partnerships in learning and decision making. UP for Learning will be a contributor. A vital "Student Voice Research and Practice" Facebook page networks this group between gatherings. It is a rich compendium of resources and a vehicle to pose dilemmas or seek advice.

This annual event is hosted by Dr. Alison Cook Sather of Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, through a long standing association with Cambridge University. Alison has published extensively in the student voice arena and has been a YATST mentor since the program's inception. It was at this seminar three years ago that Helen met Dr. Dana Mitra from Pennsylvania State University. This generated an UP commitment to serve as a learning laboratory for research on the power of partnership.

The trip was made possible through the generosity of the Bay and Paul Foundations.

Upcoming Events

Helen Beattie and an UP for Learning youth participant will present the keynote address at the **Agency of Education's Personalized Learning Plan** conference at Castleton State College on August 12. The focus will be on the power of youth-adult partnership to promote engaging learning.

The **YATST Orientation/Retreat** will be held at Goddard College, September 6–7.

A **Communicating School Redesign Seminar**, open to all Vermont schools will be hosted at Vermont College the morning of September 23 at Vermont College of the Arts. UPstite schools will continue for the afternoon and evening as a kick-off to their yearlong efforts.

The next training for **Getting to 'Y': Youth Bring Meaning to their Risk Behavior Survey** will be held on October 1.

UP for Learning will be featured keynote at the **Vermont School Counselors' Association annual conference** on October 9: Just Around the

Corner: What's Next for Our Young Vermonters.

The Story of Great Expectations workshop will be held on October 15.

The **Rowland Foundation 2014 conference** on October 30 highlights Developing Character: Student Achievement and Social-Emotional Learning . UP will host a workshop on Great Expectations to complement keynote speaker Angela Duckworth's exploration of the influence of grit on learning.

UP for Learning, in partnership with Full Frame Communications and The School Project Foundation, will offer a workshop on Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens at the **annual conference of Vermont school boards and superintendents** on October 30.

YATST facilitator trainings: UPstite Training, November 7–8 Goddard College; YATST Facilitator Training, November 14–15, Goddard College.



The Blue Mountain YATST team

YATST School *UP*dates

Blue Mountain Union High School

“I learned that things are more complicated than they appear—so everything is a process.” This reflection from a YATST team member at Blue Mountain Union School was one key insight at the end of a busy and productive year. Youth-adult partnership moved to a new level at BMU, as YATST work was grounded in a new credit-bearing course for the program’s second year.

The team accomplished a major project in first semester: collaborating with the faculty to establish an Advisory period that began in January. In March, when the school budget was voted down, the YATST team took up a new challenge: educating the community about the value of their school through posters, radio spots, letters to the editor, and public forums. When the BMU budget finally passed on the fourth vote in May, students were elated, but they recognized that the lengthy process had yielded more than funding. As

teacher Anne Bergeron noted after a YATST-led discussion for the public, the students “spoke their truths and left a board and community asking them for ways we can facilitate student, community, board discussions about learning. They were validated and respected and empowered.” In a sign of that respect, Superintendent Richard Pike attended the group’s final class presentations and spoke about his appreciation for their work and hope for continued partnership in the future.

In addition to the major group projects with Advisory and the budget campaign, BMU students also pursued individual ideas for school improvement, applying the Four Rs framework to topics based on their personal interests. Some projects were directly related to teaching and learning: beginning a peer mentoring program for juniors to work with 9th encouraging more use of the school’s outdoor classroom, examining variations in grading practices, expanding

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community-based internships, and creating a new “one-to-one” program to provide laptop computers for all incoming 9th grade students. Other projects that addressed non-classroom aspects of school life—renovating locker rooms and advocating for changes in food service—still engaged their student leaders in action research, youth-adult partnership, facilitating dialogue, and problem-solving.

Some projects made real progress and saw concrete results, while others proved hard to implement and will take more time. In their final reflections, however, all students cited growth in their own leadership, collaboration, and learning skills as a valuable outcome. That growth process should continue next year, as budget passage ensured that BMU will continue to have a YATST class—an enthusiastic team of a dozen returning students, ready for more challenges. As one said, “I’ve learned so much in this group. I feel like YATST is my family.”

Burlington High School

by Dov Stucker and Benjamin Roesch

During the 2012–13 school year, both of us had the unique opportunity to step away from our teaching practice and serve as Partnership for Change Fellows—“lead-learners” invested in the redesign of teaching and learning in Burlington and Winooski. Emerging from that experience, we were both struck by the transformative potential of student voice, and the degree to which it is often treated like window-dressing. The goal of the School Innovation Seminar [SIS], a full-year interdisciplinary elective course at Burlington High School, was to use the exploration of school itself as a catalyst for student growth and leadership, and as an opportunity to open channels for the application of students’ own wisdom.

Inspired by the work of YATST/UP for Learning, the course offered students a focus-area with immediate relevance and purpose. Specific topics covered included neuroscience; conditions for learning; motivation and mindset; school organization; growth, assessment, and proficiency. Aside from the rich material we were able to explore, the course was a direct investment in learners: after a few months students were able join adult-level conversations about school change; by the Spring, they were able to con-

fidently initiate and facilitate those conversations themselves.

A few highlights from the pilot year of SIS include:

- The design and implementation of a “Student Consultancy” model, in which professional educators brought dilemmas to SIS students, who offered their insight and wisdom.
- The early investment in New Zealand-inspired Inquiry-Based Learning, in which student projects emerged from natural curiosity, and only later pivoted toward applied purpose and impact.
- The cultivation of dozens of community-partnerships, taking many forms (e.g., guest-facilitators, research partners, consultees, etc).
- A unique student-centered site-visit to Casco Bay High School, in which SIS students engaged directly with CBHS administrators, teachers, and students, and built reciprocal relationships between two schools on different

points of the transformation-curve.

- SIS students designing, hosting, and facilitating a conference, which highlighted their Inquiry and Action Projects for an audience of over 60 professional educators and community partners.

There is no doubt that future iterations of the course will evolve and change, but we feel blessed to have

had the chance to nurture a learning environment that feels so authentic, relevant, purposeful, and empowering.



Craftsbury Academy

Craftsbury’s student council and YATST team merged this year and has become the Craftsbury Academy Student Senate. This group decided to take on the task of designing and planning an end of year two day thematic experience for the school. This involved interviewing teachers regarding their expectations for a thematic unit, and interviewing students regarding their interests. The team then analyzed this data and drafted the thematic unit’s goals and objectives. They thoughtfully screened theme options based the 4 Rs model, knowing that engagement would be directly related to evidence of rigor, relevance, relationships and shared responsi-

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YATST School Updates



Craftsbury students get a taste of China at the Single Pebble restaurant.

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bility. The principal reimbursed the group for the out-of-school time hours for this curriculum work.

“Exploring Chinese Culture” was the ultimate decision, in part sparked by a summer exchange program which involved several students hosting young people from China. They organized a day trip to Burlington where they learned Chinese dance and took Tai Chi classes. Plans to learn how to row the large Dragon Boats was curtailed by high winds on the lake that day, but was replaced by a surprise invitation to a Bhutanese wedding! Martial arts lessons carried over into the second day.

Harwood Union High School

by Ellen Berrings

This year has been the year-long second phase of action research from our student and faculty surveys completed in the Spring of 2013. Our work has focused on activities designed to share the data in terms of strengths and surprising discrepancies. We asked each group (students and staff) through chalk talk activities to share their thoughts on the root causes and possible solutions on the areas targeted by the YATST team that could lead to meaningful change at Harwood.

The teacher chalk talk work happened in the Fall. Cat Biddle, our amazing researcher, graciously collated/synthesized this data for us. Our student chalk talks met with many delays due to uncooperative winter weather that canceled four of our longer meetings. We did not lose our drive and did complete a school wide chalk talk activity. It took two long work sessions to collate and synthesize the student data. We now have an excellent summary of the root causes and possible solutions on our survey data and are ready to move into action for the 2014-15 year. We know that we need to begin with dialogue driven by what we learned from the chalk talks in

order to gain consensus on action that our school community believes would be most effective to improve Harwood in the realm of the four Rs.

In addition to the larger YATST work, Asah Whalen and Ellen Berrings embarked on a communications journey through the Communicating School Redesign Through the Youth Adult Partnership Lens course co-created by Helen and Jane Feinberg, communications expert from the Frameworks Institute. The work of the course was to develop communication strategies to share information about Vermont’s Act 77. This work clearly translates to strategies to communicate the message of our YATST work. The learning curve was steep (and continues to this day!) but we both walked away with a greater understanding of how to craft an effective message through multiple modalities. Next year Asah and Ellen will return for 202 and we will be sending Amy Rex, our co-principal, Marcus Grace and three students to participate in 101.

Next year promises to be filled with exciting ACTION!

Hazen Union High School

Hitting the grounding running this fall, the Hazen YATST team administered their 4 Rs survey and completed a data analysis retreat. Focusing on their work with the Communicating School Redesign course, Hazen YATSTers helped create a powerpoint illustrating the “why” of school redesign and presented the powerpoint at an Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union inservice and at a Hazen faculty meeting. Team members also helped a middle school student group develop plans to introduce mindset theory to their peers through a “YET” campaign. This spring, the YATST team welcomed rising freshmen and a new YATST co-advisor, high school history teacher Corey Maskell, and established goals for next school year.

Mill River Union School

There was no rest for the weary, as the Mill River YATST team convened at 7:30 AM most Friday mornings this year to organize implementing their second YATST bi-annual survey, analyze the data, and take action. They took full advantage of having comparative data to find trends over the two years, further informing their priority areas. The team’s findings were shared with the faculty to gain insight into both possible root causes and potential means to address challenges.

In order to address their first identified goal, to “increase student voice in the classroom in order to improve com-

YATST School Updates

munication and inform instruction and classroom climate”, the team worked with teachers and the principal to craft an end-of-course survey to ensure that all students had input into classroom instruction. All teachers administered the survey at the end of the spring semester, including capturing the reflections of the seniors. This data is being summarized by classroom over the summer and will be integrated into the faculty in-service time at the beginning of the new academic year.

The second action step was to “increase a sense of positive climate in our school for all school community members.” Monthly school spirit days, installing message boards around the school, instituting creative ways to improve engagement in the school’s monthly reading requirement, and highlighting the successes and achievements of community members were the primary strategies implemented. A rich and diverse list of possibilities to further these goals caps off their action plan, which will ensure that the Mill River team loses no time at the start-up of the new year in moving forward with their work.

Otter Valley Union High School

by Olivia Bloomer and Charlotte Winslow, Otter Valley YATST student members

One of the hardest parts of high school is relationships: any teenager would agree. The thing is, one of the hardest relationships, and most important, is the relationship formed with the teachers. Most students, and some teachers, don’t understand how important this could be. At the beginning of the school year in the first semester YATST students conducted a survey that explored the strengths and concerns of our school. The focus of this survey was to gain insight to improve the educational experience at Otter Valley. After this survey was conducted the results were shown to three different groups of people: students, teachers, and the school board. These three groups then discussed and wrote down their opinions and ideas concerning the information given. After looking at the data that was collected, the most popular suggestion was to form a teacher advisory with students.

After we decided that the advisory was going to be our focus, we took several steps to gain information. Our first step was to simply look up what an advisory was and why we needed to include it in our schedule. There were many questions that stemmed from the how and why, such as what time of the day is most appropriate to have them? How is the time spent? And, would it be beneficial here at Otter Valley? From here, we started our research. We began by taking notes from various sources, researching other school advisories, and talking to a number of educators with previous advisory experiences, which provided us with a wealth of information. We also did research on both out of state and in state schools with advisories.

After doing this extensive research, we combined our knowledge from the different sources and formed our five key dimensions. We found the idea of the five dimensions from one of our sources, but tweaked a few points as well as adding more as we continued our research. The first is purpose, but it has two parts. The main focus of the purpose is the goal of the advisory, which is different for every school. Here at Otter Valley our main goal is to build relationships between teachers and students. The second piece to the

purpose is building buy-in. We need to interest and educate the members of the school, and surrounding community, on our goal. This piece will take the longest because the information needs to be understood and supported by a large number of people.

Once the goal is supported, the next step is organization. The advisory program needs to be organized in a way that allows our purpose to be met. To do this, we need to consider four interlinked areas which are, how many people and who, the time and space, professional development and support, and student ownership.

After the groups and time is figured out, the next step is determining the advisory program content. This varies

depending on the purpose, nature of the school, and the individual advisors. The content of the advisory may include focusing on essential questions, themes, or skills. After this is determined and put in to practice, there will be regular



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assessments to determine if the purpose is being met, if the participants meet the expectations, and to measure other specific outcomes. These assessments will be given to the students and advisors to collect data that will help improve the system. The final dimension is leadership. This is a group within the school that will be heading the project. We are hoping to see that it is composed of students, teachers, and administrators. This group will be in charge of designing, implementing, and assessing the advisory program.

After receiving data from the survey, conducting chalk talks, and talking to students and staff, we came to conclusion that advisories would benefit the Otter Valley community. This would help build student- teacher relationships as one aspect of the ongoing improvement of our school's climate. We plan to start the process of building buy-in and gaining support by presenting a slide show to our principle. After this, we will continue to gain support by presenting at a school board meeting, and faculty meeting. We will also continue our research and planning for the years ahead of us. Our goal is to put the advisory program into place within the next two years. This will happen by most of the planning being done next year with the hope that in the following year the advisory will be in place.

Peoples Academy

Peoples Academy's YATSTs team and student council reconfigured their respective roles (and names) this past year. The new student leadership group which is focused on learning met weekly to help support the Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens course participants. They served as a sounding board for ways to implement personalized learning plans and performance based assessment in the school. This group will be helping to organize a forum early in the new year to kick-off the communications strategy, including a video that is being finished over the summer.

Twinfield Union High School

This year Twinfield's YATST work was completed in the Humanities class that is a required English and History class for all sophomores. The class is based on an exploration of ethics and the YATST learning is embedded in the unit "School As Subject." Students reflected on their own educational experiences through



the lens of the 4 Rs, read the book *Freedom Writers* and created action plans.

Reflecting on why she chose to be involved, Lila Humphries-Lepage noted, "It's my duty because I value student voice so strongly. I personally want to be able to have a more active voice in decision-making and student activism, so I strongly believe that everyone should have that right. I chose to make it my duty because it is something I believe in so strongly."

Student action projects addressed an exploration of Twinfield's potential 1:1 computer initiative, a flexible/interest based day every week in the school schedule, improvements to the baseball facilities, a more inclusive student council and a student-run café.

Williamstown High School

It is an exciting time at Williamstown High School because of student voice, youth and adult dialogue, and student leadership. According to YATST advisor, April Wortman, the school has the students involved in this year's YATST group to thank; they have built a solid foundation and are eager to sustain their work through the years to come. As the students and their advisors celebrate their accomplishments from the school year and say goodbye to two seniors who will be moving on, they are gearing up for the start of the 2014/2015 school year. What a year it's been.

The newly formed YATST group at Williamstown started the school year by creating a survey for all students and adults and then organized a day of support for those taking the survey in the library. During the past school year, the YATST crew created a very effective promotional video that was shown to the whole school and then celebrated it at the last YATST conference in the spring. With survey results in hand and with the guidance and support of YATST staff Helen Beattie, Erin Dezell and Peter Evans, students finished the year by looking carefully at the collected data in order to discover the themes and trends that will be the focus for next year and in the years to come.

The Williamstown YATST crew is looking forward to creating and facilitating a faculty meeting in the fall when they will share the survey results with faculty and staff. Due to the amazing work of the YATST crew, many new students are interested in joining next year and in fact attended the final few meetings of the year in order to be ready to go. Williamstown is showing what can happen when a core of motivated and enthusiastic students and teachers decide to work together to make their school a better place.

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Youth-adult partnership is serious fun — especially when we break out the YATST pipe cleaners.



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NEWSLETTER DESIGN BY DANA DWINELL-YARDLEY.

I used to be more of a strong leader, telling people what to do. Now that I've learned to facilitate, I help other people to work together.

—Blue Mountain Union student



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