

# UP for Learning

Winter 2014 Unleashing the Power of Partnership for Learning



## Messengers for Change: Communications Course Studies School Redesign



### 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.

At the end of a long school week, most students and educators head home for the weekend to relax and recharge. But every six weeks, a group of students and educators from four Vermont school districts head, instead, to the Highland Lodge in Greensboro for a weekend of intensive study. They are enrolled in a course called “Communicating School Redesign Through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens.” It’s a year-long experience in which small school teams, including a mix of students and educators, are learning a research-based approach to communications that is geared toward building public understanding of social issues and public will for positive change. Specifically, they are learning about the mental models that most Americans, including Vermonters, bring to the topic of education, and how the current public conversation does not help people understand why school change is so necessary. In addition, they are mastering a set of “frame elements” and messages that have been thoroughly tested through qualitative and quantitative social science methods, and have been demonstrated to move public support for progressive change.

Students in the course receive college credit through the Community College of Vermont (CCV) and educators are awarded masters-level credits through St. Michaels College. The course was co-developed by Helen Beattie of Up for

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## Making Sense of Our Work: Cat Biddle Studies YATST in Depth



Catherine Biddle

With over 150 hours of audio recordings, Catherine Biddle may hold the prize this year for most conversations about YATST and youth-adult partnerships. Calling Hardwick home for the fall and early winter months, Catherine (Cat) is a PhD candidate from Pennsylvania State University, here to observe YATST in action. Her dissertation is titled *“How did we get here?”: Making sense of youth-adult partnership, rationale and implementation*. The study will explore how YATST teams develop youth-adult partnerships, to deepen understanding of the rationale for their work and the goals they hope to achieve.

Cat’s first experience with YATST/UP for Learning was last year when she accompanied Dr. Dana Mitra to Vermont to conduct the 2011–2012 YATST year-end evaluation. Describing her first YATST training as life changing, Cat had never experienced anything like YATST before. Never had she met students with such strong facilitation skills able to participate in sophisticated conversations: “If you haven’t seen it, you don’t know.” After experiencing YATST first-hand Cat was inspired to shift her thesis research toward better understanding the dynamics of youth-adult partnership at UP for Learning/YATST.

With laptop and signature voice recorder in hand, Cat attended all of our YATST retreats, trainings, and workshops. She attended many YATST team meetings and witnessed the roll-out of their major events. Utilizing her data analysis and interview skills, Cat became a helpful observer to many YATST survey analysis retreats. She also shared her expertise in interviewing in the Communicating School Redesign through the Youth Adult Partnership Lens class as the participants were developing their interview methodology.

In addition to attending and documenting YATST events Cat was also collecting data on the two new middle school initiatives that took place this fall. With Dr. Mitra, she

will evaluate the Getting to ‘Y’ and Great Expectations middle school efforts this year.

Celebrating and sharing youth-adult partnership and the work

of YATST/UP for Learning, Cat traveled from northern Vermont to several conferences. She presented at the Values and Leadership Conference in Oklahoma City, giving a talk on “Partnership and purpose: A critical look at youth-adult partnerships and the role of values.” At the same conference, Cat and Dr. Mitra presented “Student voice making a difference using a theory driven approach.” Traveling to Indianapolis, Indiana, Cat spoke at the University Council on Education Administration Annual meeting, presenting “Building an engaged educational community: The case of a youth-adult partnership network.”

In early 2014 Dr. Mitra, Cat and UP for Learning founder/director Helen Beattie will be presenting “Deep, sustainable partnerships: The case of a multi-school youth-adult partnership network” at the American Educational Research Association meeting in Philadelphia.

Having completed her field research in Vermont, Cat still has plenty of work to do. When she isn’t transcribing hours of audio recordings from YATST meetings and UP for Learning workshops, you can now find her enjoying time with her husband in College Park, PA.

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Learning/YATST and Jane Feinberg of Full Frame Communications in Massachusetts, along with Greg Sharrow of the Vermont Folklife Center at Middlebury College.

“At first, it felt like such a luxury to carve out the time and space to help educators and students learn a new and

challenging competency,” said Feinberg, who is a 30-year communications veteran. “Six months into the experience, I see how necessary the course is to helping communities in Vermont genuinely understand the educational changes that are afoot here. We have an amazing group of people in this course who can become lead messengers of change for the state.”



Daniel Baron at work.

## Facilitation Training in November

“In order to foster change, equality in voice and comfort among *all* members must be established,” reflected a Williamstown Middle High School student after spending two days developing his facilitation skills. Williamstown, along with five other YATST high schools, participated in a two-day Facilitation Training this past November. The youth/adult teams were introduced to protocols by Daniel Baron, a founder of the School Reform Initiative. Over the two days they identified the roles and responsibilities of a facilitator, developed a deeper understanding of the strengths and challenges of this role, and explored effective strategies to guide discussion.

A contribution from the Bay & Paul Foundations not only made this training possible, but allowed us to document this powerful experience. The entire two-day facilitation training was filmed for a video showcasing the power of youth as facilitators. The new video the new video will be premiered at the upcoming national School Reform Initiative conference and will be available on the YATST and UP for Learning websites. We'll let you know when it's up!

*I often find [discomfort] and fear to be the cause of most disengagement, especially between teachers and students. The activities we participated in during this weekend allowed for the establishment of communication.*

—student reflection from the facilitation training

## Getting to Y: Middle School

Getting to 'Y': Youth Bring Meaning to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) is an initiative that began five years ago as a partnership with the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE). The AOE was one of only a few states to recognize the importance of bringing the YRBS data back to students to analyze as a means to spark action; the AOE committed resources to this end. In the intervening years, half of Vermont's high schools have participated in this program, many establishing youth retreats and action groups as an annual event. During this time period, five middle schools also joined in. This year, due to a generous AOE grant, "Getting to Y" was opened up to middle schools only, and we anticipated training six schools this fall. When 20 middle schools applied to have teams trained, we knew that we were on the right track and had a responsibility to respond to this demand. The fall training was stretched to accommodate nine schools and the Department of Health has secured funding to assure that the balance of 11 middle schools will be trained in January. Pennsylvania State University is conducting an evaluation of this effort. This initiative is now an identified priority in the Department of Health's action plan, with a commitment to assure its long-term viability.



Michelle Maseroni and Megan McKeighan, students at Otter Valley Union High School, cofacilitated both Getting to 'Y' workshops.



Northfield students

## Great Expectations: Middle School

YATST partnered with the Vermont Agency of Education to further develop its “Great Expectations... or Not?” initiative, empowering students to educate their own school communities about the power of expectations and the neuropsychology of learning. Six middle school teams participated in a fall training where they learned multiple strategies to share this information back at home with peers, teachers, and community members. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the event was the able facilitation of Dylan McAllister, Audrey Barnett, and Leighanne Merchant, all from Hazen Union High School, who modeled the capacity of young people to take a lead role in training. Pennsylvania State University is conducting an evaluation of this effort and the training has been videotaped to allow for replication of this initiative.



The delegation from Hazen Union High School at Goddard

## Fall Orientation Retreats

**F**ive YATST schools gathered to launch the new year during this past September’s orientation retreat at Goddard College. Over the weekend new members were welcomed to YATST teams, action research plans were revisited, friendships renewed, and we rekindled our community’s great spirit through shared laughter and adventure. Three basic skill-building workshops were offered as well as ample Team Time. The YATST teams were able to build their collaborative capacity through an evening of outdoor adventure activities which ended with a celebratory bonfire and s’mores!

Two YATST schools could not attend the Goddard retreat, so an additional day-long retreat was held for Otter Valley Union High School and Williamstown Middle High School at the Three Stallion Inn in Randolph. Otter Valley

had time to focus on survey development and implementation planning, while Williamstown continued to deepen their understanding of the 4 Rs, youth-adult partnership and the action research model.

These retreats were made possible through the generosity of the Wisdom Connection Foundation.



Otter Valley students

*This group, YATST, can make a big change. And if you stay with it, it can make a change in you!*

—student reflection from the Goddard Orientation Retreat



The Student Voice Collaborative and UTEC tour the Montpelier High School greenhouse

## Bridges to Partnership: from New York to Vermont

*Students from New York City’s Student Voice Collaborative attended the Building Bridges to Partnership Conference this past October. Below, Cristal Cruz, an 11th grader at Brooklyn Frontiers High School, reflects on her trip to Vermont.*

The day we arrived in Vermont, the beautiful, different-shaded, leaves and fresh air quickly welcomed me. Honestly, the idea of the trip had me very pessimistic. I didn’t believe that children in other states could ever understand what it is to be a New Yorker. Living in NYC all my life brought me to the assumption that only in New York do we face certain adversity in school and at home. As soon as I met the outgoing, cheerful, and friendly adolescents of Vermont, not only did the environment welcome me, the people also made me feel very welcome. The night of the campfire at Twinfield High School, I exchanged stories with others and learned that even though we come from different places and different ethnic groups we share similar challenges. That helped me open my eyes to a

## Bridges to Partnership: Learning New Skills to Redesign Schools

“The strategies and concepts I learned today will help set the foundation for a powerful change in my school,” was one reflection at the October 9 statewide conference, Bridges to Partnership: Youth and Adults Learning New Skills to Redesign Schools. Youth-adult teams from eight Vermont high schools welcomed participants from many other places: a team representing five New York City high schools; a Lowell, Massachusetts high school alternative program; two faculty from Eagle Rock School in Estes Park, Colorado; and a number of Agency of Education staff. Together, they explored simple yet powerful tools to elevate student voice in learning and educational change efforts.

Keynote speaker Dr. Margery Ginsberg defined her motivational framework for culturally responsive education and emphasized the importance of identifying rigor, relevance, relationships, and shared responsibility in our schools. Her youth and adult facilitation team shared their expertise in weaving student voice into the process of high school redesign. Teams dispersed to one of three workshops: Data-in-a-Day, Shadowing Students as a Pathway to Partnership, or Elevating Student Feedback in Instructional Design.

Participants left this skill-building day with valuable tools to jumpstart the implementation of flexible pathways and personalized learning plans, putting students at the center of their learning.

For the full story and workshop resources, please visit [yatst.com/resources](http://yatst.com/resources).



The facilitation team: Catherine Biddle, Margery Ginsberg, Catherine Brown, Cristine Chopra, Dwight Walton and Helen Beattie

greater picture — not just the one I live in.

The conference itself helped me find ways to obtain information that can help me better my school. The trip was a very influential and amazing experience that helped me grow as a person, as well as a leader.



## Introducing Our Assistant Director: Erin Dezell

Erin's deep connection with learning began when she was a high school student at Hazen Union. Supported by several teachers who enabled her to pursue her passions with unwavering support and high expectations, Erin became a leader within her high school community and carried the same ambition and love of learning to college and beyond.

Earning a bachelor's degree in psychology at Ohio Wesleyan University, Erin took on a leadership role in her community acting as Moderator to her themed living house, serving on psychology student board, and working as a student counselor at the Academic Resource Center. Awarded the Community Bridge Builder Award, Erin sat on two boards of directors. Erin lives in Northern Vermont and continues to be dedicated and involved in her community by serving on the Board of Directors for Wonder & Wisdom and on the Lakeview Union Elementary School Board. When she's not in a board or committee meeting, you'll find Erin curled up with a good book and a slice (or two) of pie.

## A Voice at the Table

The Vermont House and Senate, during the legislative session of 2013, passed Act 77 into law. The law "encourages flexible pathways to secondary school completion." Most Vermont educators agree that the law has the potential to transform the way students engage in learning. One requirement of the law is the creation of a Working Group made up of diverse stakeholders, including students, that would make recommendations regarding the implementation of one of the law's requirements, personal learning plans for all students. UP for Learning/YATST was asked to be part of the Working Group and has been represented by leadership team member Peter Evans. The group has been meeting monthly since July and members are confident its work will be well received by secondary school communities across Vermont.

What has the group accomplished? It has focused on three related but unique resources that will be available to all schools starting in January. The first is a readiness survey that will help schools gauge their capacity to implement personal learning plans (PLPs). The second is a detailed process for schools to use when designing their plan for bringing PLPs to students. The third is a set of resources for educators to support their work.

One of the central tenets that emerged from the work is the need to consider students first when making any and all decisions. This quickly became one of the group's norms. As a result, the importance of putting students at the center of this new design for education has been raised at each step the group has taken. The shift from teachers taking full responsibility for student learning to shared responsibility for learning through youth-adult partnerships is no simple change. New skills will have to be learned. Schools' cultures will have to shift. Teachers and students will have to reconsider their respective roles. This is where UP for Learning and YATST may play an important role in providing high quality, relevant, and research-based professional development to school communities across Vermont.

## UP in UK: Helen Beattie Takes the Work to England and Beyond

UP for Learning director Helen Beattie was invited to present the YATST model in Cambridge, England, in the third annual Student Voice Conference: Linking Across the Lines, June 25–27, 2013. This invitation-only gathering of researchers and practitioners from thirteen countries around the world convened for the third year in a row to share their work and further develop global initiatives to elevate student voice. Dr. Alison Cook-Sather, Bryn Mawr professor and nationally recognized researcher on student voice, initiated this gathering and has been a long-standing YATST mentor and advocate.

Following this convening, the YATST model was shared at a conference in Scotland for educational leaders. Additionally, Dr. Catherine Kostenius, a professor at Lulea University of Technology in Sweden, shared an overview of YATST at a national conference for school psychologists. An e-mail list for participants regularly provides a wealth of information to inform the development of UP for Learning.



Blue Mountain's YATST class poses in the midst of an icebreaker.

## Connections in All Directions

The **Green Mountain Coffee Roasters Foundation** generously renewed their \$30,000 grant late last spring. We also were pleased to receive a \$44,500 grant from the Agency of Education to further our Getting to 'Y' and Great Expectations efforts through the fall. The Bay and Paul Foundations increased their support to \$65,000 for this current academic year. Due to a new collaborative relationship with the Vermont Department of Health, we received an \$11,000 grant to underwrite the expenses of an unexpected additional Getting to 'Y' middle school training occurring this January. We appreciate the confidence in our work that all these organizations have shown with their funding support.

Last year the **University of New Mexico (UNM)** secured a W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant to replicate UP for Learning's initiative, **Getting to 'Y': Youth Bring Meaning to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey**. Helen Beattie helped them implement the project in one Native American School and one largely hispanic, urban school — one of the poorest in the Albuquerque area. Their evaluation suggests a highly successful pilot and plans are underway to further develop this initiative in other regions of New Mexico. In the meantime, UP for Learning is collaborating with the UNM faculty to revamp the training manual and will seek bi-state funding to develop this model. This efforts serves as testimony to the fact that Getting to Y, like YATST, is not only suited to a small, rural state but has



the potential to thrive in many diverse contexts.

Twinfield junior and YATST team member **Morgan MacIver** (at right, second from left) was appointed last spring to the **Vermont School Board**. She will serve in a non-voting capacity for one year and become a voting member during her senior year of high school and second year on the board. Morgan says she's learning so much and is incredibly honored to hold this position. She continues to advocate for student voice and input any chance she gets.



UP for Learning director Helen Beattie, assistant director Erin Dezell, Twinfield YATSTer Morgan MacIver, and Hazen YATST alum Taylor Ducharme (pictured at left) attended the four-day **International Democratic Education Conference** in Boulder, Colorado, this past August. The Bay & Paul Foundations offered their support to make this trip possible. While in

Colorado the UP team went to visit the Eagle Rock School where they participated in the students' Presentations of Learning. In reflecting on his experience, Taylor says, "I have

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# Upcoming Events

The work of YATST youth facilitators will be featured as a Learning Experience at the annual **Winter Meeting of the School Reform Initiative this January** in Cambridge, MA. YATST students have received training in SRI practices for the past four years and will share their experience leading conversations around school change.

The next training for **Getting to 'Y': Youth Bring Meaning to their Risk Behavior Survey** will be held **on January 15, 2014**.

All of the youth-adult teams that have participated in the YATST Facilitator Training with Daniel Baron are invited to attend a **Learning Reunion in March 2014** where we will refresh our facilitation skills, address dilemmas and champion successes.

Participants in the Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens course will present their work at a **statewide conference on April 29, 2014**.

This will be the premiere of communication campaign materials, such as travelling displays and videos, developed to help communicate the message of school redesign. The conference will provide a chance to field-test and share this important work.

The Dewey House for Civic Engagement at UVM will organize and facilitate the second annual **public speaking workshop** for YATST students on **February 2, 2014**.

UP for Learning Director Helen Beattie, Penn State Professor Dana Mitra, and Ph.D. candidate Catherine Biddle will present at the **American Educational Research Association annual meeting in April 2014**. The AERA event is the premier convention for academic educational researchers in the U.S. Their session is titled "The Roles of Student Voice, Participation and Youth-Adult Partnerships in Promoting Student Development."

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been inspired to . . . challenge myself every day to be engaged in my studies, engaged with my friends and engaged within my greater community. . . . There is great truth to the quote [Helen] introduced to me, "There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about." I'm excited to become a part of the community."

**Megan McKeighan**, a senior from Otter Valley Union High School, initiated and facilitated an introduction to of Getting to 'Y' at the Imagine a World Without Hate conference in October.

Helen recently visited a high school youth action research team in **Sydney, Australia**, and shared the YATST introductory video. The students were heartened to know that others around the world were engaged in similar work. A 10-school network is considering making the 4 Rs a focus for next year, inspired by the Vermont model.



## **YATST Expands to Elementary School**

This fall, fifth and sixth graders from Moretown and Fayston Elementary schools gathered at the Big Picture in Waitsfield to deepen their leadership skills. Co-facilitated by Helen and Hazen Union eighth grader Maddie Urie, the students analyzed their school climate survey and began to develop action plans to ultimately share with their respective school boards, faculty, and any other stakeholder groups they feel would benefit from their work.





Burlington High School students participate in the School Innovation Seminar

## YATST Team Snapshots

### **Big Picture School/South Burlington High School**

The Big Picture School is focusing their efforts on communications development about school change which will serve both the Big Picture School and also strengthen a bridge between this program the South Burlington High School. The Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens course is serving as the vehicle for their efforts.

### **Blue Mountain Union High School**

YATST evolved from a capstone project format last year, to a credit-bearing course this year. This was a result of a 2012–2013 YATST team member’s effort to ensure the sustainability of YATST over time. The class has formed an advisory period that will begin in the spring semester. Working either as individuals or in small groups, they are in the process of updating the attendance policy, pursuing a grant for new technology, starting a tutoring and mentoring program, researching an alternative program and creating a fair grading policy.

### **Burlington High School**

Burlington High School has established a credit-bearing class, the School Innovation Seminar, which is informed/inspired by YATST. The class spent the first semester studying learning theory through their own inquiry-based projects. The semester culminated with use of the School Reform Initiative “consultancy protocol” to provide feedback to the school principal regarding the implementation of personal-

ized learning plans at the school, as well as offering feedback to the head of guidance about behavioral policy updates. This semester will begin with exploring proficiency-based graduation methods and how learning is assessed.

### **Craftsbury Academy**

At Craftsbury Academy, the students decided to redesign their student council utilizing a YATST model, and create a separate committee to handle special events planning. They have been working through the implications of this change, drafting new job descriptions and clarifying roles and responsibilities. A sizable team attended the facilitator training, to further strengthen their ability to orchestrate this change.

### **Harwood Union High School**

The Harwood team has conducted their second YATST student engagement survey and shared this data at a faculty meeting, celebrating strengths and soliciting feedback into “root causes” and possible solutions to challenges. Currently they are planning a school-wide “chalk talk” in which they will ask students to reflect and respond to the survey data. A dynamic student and faculty duo are enrolled in the “Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens” and will be integrating their work into spring plans.

### **Hazen Union High School**

The Hazen YATST team administered their second learning engagement survey and analyzed the data. They are

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currently organizing an early winter faculty meeting and means to share this information with the student body. The Hazen team (right) has also served as lead trainers in the middle school “Great Expectations” initiative. They tuned the training agenda and facilitated the actual middle school training day this fall. Hazen was the first school to pilot the “Great Expectations” initiative last year, leading a successful district in-service and then facilitating sessions with all Hazen 10th graders. Three students and two adults are enrolled in the “Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens” course.



### **Mill River Union School**

The team has re-administered their school-wide survey and shared this data with the faculty. They are planning next steps to reach out to the student body and create action plans to address identified concerns.

### **Otter Valley Union High School**

YATST has been established as a credit-bearing class at OVHS. The team conducted their learning engagement survey and analyzed the data, identifying three strengths and three concerns. Utilizing a “chalk talk” process, they shared their findings with both the Otter Valley faculty and their school board. They are collecting further feedback through a “graffiti board” in the school lobby and will soon identify action steps. In order to spread the YATST mission, the team has also created a website ([bit.ly/1kGUGsL](http://bit.ly/1kGUGsL)) to access the survey data and learn more about their efforts.

### **Peoples Academy**

The Peoples Academy YATST team assumed a new form this year, as the student council and committee structure at the school has evolved. Two faculty and two students are actively developing their school-wide communications strategy as part of the Communicating School Redesign through the Youth-Adult Partnership Lens course. Peoples Academy has identified several key threads of the “Great Expectations” YATST module as a school-wide priority and are utilizing these “mindset” materials accordingly.

### **Twinfield Union High School**

Twinfield’s YATST group (right) of 19 student and adult members have engaged in a total of 244 hours of dialogue, workshops and action planning since this past September. The team hosted visiting schools from Lowell, MA and New York City who attended this fall’s statewide conference. Twinfield members will be shadowing students from other schools, and hosting student visitors, to deepen their understanding of school change. Plans are underway to pilot the “Data-in-a-Day” process this spring, which was introduced at the state-wide conference.



### **Williamstown High School**

Joining YATST in late August, the Williamstown Middle High school team is composed of three staff members and 12 students who hit the ground running, attending the YATST Orientation Retreat, Building Bridges statewide Conference and Facilitator training. With help from their coach Peter Evans they continue to work on survey implementation and YATST promotion.

## **UP for Learning offers strategies, tools and expert coaching**

for building a school community in which learning is engaging for everyone and youth are fully empowered. Vital youth-adult partnerships lie at the heart of this vision. YATST remains UP for Learning’s signature training program and the fullest expression of our core values and principles.

For more information about UP for Learning, go to [yatst.com](http://yatst.com) or contact Director Helen Beattie at [hnbeattie@gmail.com](mailto:hnbeattie@gmail.com).



The **UP for Learning** newsletter provides a brief snapshot of our work. It documents our efforts, strengthens communication between retreats, sparks reflection and celebration and inspires others. Partnership — we can learn a great deal from each other!

NEWSLETTER DESIGN BY DANA DWINELL-YARDLEY.