

*Reflections from a First-Year Teacher  
on The First-Year Teacher  
Collaborative Group*

*The Teachers' Loft has served as both a respite and a motivator for me. While it has been a great place to relax and share feelings, thoughts, and ideas about teaching, it has also pushed me to strive to improve my methods. While a great deal of processing and discussion occurred, underlying all of that was a silent, strong force of sorts. I believe this "force" emanated from the energy of the group. Improvement was at its core. How can we not only stay and survive in teaching, but how can we become better teachers? These two main themes, while not always made explicit, seemed subtly woven into the tone of each meeting.*

*I have appreciated the organization, thoughtfulness, and sincerity of the group facilitators. It has also been so refreshing to hear the challenges and successes of my peers. Professionally, the collection of teaching resources I have received will give me much to think about over the summer and has indeed helped my teaching presently. Personally, The Teachers' Loft has helped me stay sane. It has been a place to just express the daily tales of teaching. I think all new teachers should be a part of something so positive.*

**The Teachers' Loft**  
116 Pleasant Street, Suite 2312  
Easthampton, MA 01027

## **The Teachers' Loft:** **A Space for Collaboration and Renewal**

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# The Teachers' Loft: A Space for Collaboration and Renewal

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## Year-End Message from the Co-Founders

Dear Friends of The Teachers' Loft:

In the midst of life events, we are pleased to pause with you and reflect on the first 15 months of The Teachers' Loft's work. We continue to make hope an active virtue by engaging in comprehensive induction and on-going professional development work with teachers. One teacher at a time, we renew our commitment to professional growth through collaboration and inquiry. At a slow but steady pace, we are taking this work into public arenas to be shared and discussed.

Our work with first-year teachers consumed most of our own first year. Last April, eight months into our work, we were pleased to present the work of our First-Year Teacher Collaborative Group at the New England Educational Research Organization (NEERO) Conference in Portsmouth, NH. Our poster presentation was well-attended and enthusiastically received. We have selected aspects of this group's work to share with you, too, in this newsletter. While our group's interaction is dynamic, Jenn and I carefully collect artifacts and document our work to share with you, our supporters, and the educational community. Our local community was also able to learn more about us on May 20th when the local paper, The Summit, printed "The Teachers' Loft: A place for new teachers to breathe". We hope you enjoy this more detailed glimpse into our work at The Teachers' Loft.

As we continue with our second year we look forward to our work and multiple presentations about this work. For the past two years, we have attended the New Teacher Symposium, a conference held in San Jose, CA and sponsored by the New Teacher Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz. This year, we submitted a proposal for a presentation on our work at The Teachers' Loft. We are honored that our proposal was accepted at a national conference, and in February we will be attending the conference to present our workshop titled, "Redefining Induction: Collaborative Inquiry Groups and the Third Space."

As we continue with our second year we have expanded our board. The Teachers' Loft board has been a small but steady body of thoughtful educators providing guidance to our budding organization. This year we have sought to expand our board and

increase our person-power as well as increase support for our mission. We are pleased to have a high school English teacher, who was a member of our first-year teacher collaborative group, as well as a veteran early childhood teacher, who now works in classrooms as a teacher educator and supervisor, join our board.

And as we continue with our second year we offer our appreciation for all of the support and encouragement offered by so many of you during these first fifteen months. We appreciate your encouraging words, your offering of time and talents as well as your generous donations. It is our pleasure to recognize you in this newsletter and take the opportunity to share our exciting work with you.

Happy Holidays and New Year to you and yours.  
Paige & Jenn

## *The Teachers' Loft gratefully acknowledges those who have donated thus far in 2004...*

David Appel & Sally Filmore  
Jeff & Erin Bazinet  
Dick & Carol Capone  
Mimi Delisle  
Clif & Mamie Field  
Fran McCracken & Michael Geglia  
David Goff  
Tiesa Graf  
Robin Gunn and Family  
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Rick & Sandi Lawrence  
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Kris & Keith Pankow  
Joe & Angela Pecori  
Elinor Saltz & Stan Samuelson  
John Scibak  
Joe & Cindy Shultz  
Jimmy & Sandy Snyder  
Sue Walz  
Nettie Webb

## *Gifts Honoring Family and Friends...*

Jeff & Erin Bazinet in Honor of Jenn Cook  
Clif & Mamie Field in Honor of Benjamin A.B. Lawrence  
Michael Gallagher & Mamie Lawrence in Honor of Richard "Hard J" Lawrence  
Tiesa Graf in Honor of James Duquette  
Rick & Sandi Lawrence in Honor of Paige Bray & Tim Lawrence  
Joe & Cindy Shultz in Honor of Marianne Shultz  
Sue Walz in Honor of Jenn Cook  
Nettie Webb in Honor of Melissa Heckler

## *Gifts in Memory Of...*

Mimi Delisle in Memory of Grace & Zana  
David Goff in Memory of Milton & Barbara Goff  
Edith Musnick in Memory of Judy Musnick  
Joe & Angela Pecori in Memory of Grace Pecori  
Jimmy & Sandy Snyder in Memory of Elizabeth T. Snyder  
Sue Walz in Memory of her father, Carl Walz, a teacher

## *Gifts of Time, Talent and Energy...*

*Our special thanks to each of the following volunteers.*

Rueben Ackerman @ Ropes & Gray  
Judy Bray @ Five Star Travel  
Marlo Cook for the customized pencils.  
Moir Collins for taking care of Godzilla.  
Kathleen Dowd @ Western MA Funding Resource Center  
Linda Griffin for conducting our focus group.  
Melissa Heckler for another round of storytelling.  
Marty Klein for being our web tech.  
Elaine Murphy @ Ropes & Gray

## First-Year Teacher Collaborative Group

During the 2003-04 school year, we invited first-year teachers in our area to become part of a first-year teacher collaborative group. The First-Year Teacher Collaborative Group formed with eight first-year teachers who committed to meet together over time to examine their teaching practice. The group met for two hours biweekly over the course of ten months. These eight teachers came from a variety of districts and school contexts in Western Massachusetts, they spanned grades 1-12, and all of them had earned either a BA or M.Ed. The work of the group was centered around supportive conversation, problem-solving, journal writing, responsive readings, and classroom inquiry projects.

When we presented this First-Year Teacher Collaborative Group's information in our poster at the New England Educational Research Organization Conference in Portsmouth, NH we had opportunities to speak with educators from New England and New York about the possibilities for collaborative professional development. The point of interest for most of our session attendees was our unique station as "the third space," separate from school and teacher education programs in colleges and universities. The idea of a gathering space for teachers that is free from school cultures and politics resonated with many of the folks with whom we talked.

Once again we have submitted a proposal to the NEERO 2005 to present, with two of our First-Year Collaborative Group participants, a symposium titled "Comprehensive Induction: The Second Year," in which the teachers will present their experiences as members of the collaborative group and how their continued inquiry projects are supporting their teaching practice.

As an out-growth of this work, one member of this first-year group has formed a group of her own this year: a teachers' writing group. Because we see this as an offshoot of last year's first-year teacher collaborative, we have given these teachers the use of our space. They met here for the first time on October 26 and will continue meeting bimonthly. Their focus is to come together to discuss writing and the teaching of writing, but perhaps more importantly, to work on reflective writing for their own growth and development as educators.

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### *What are you most proud of in your first year of teaching?*

As part of our End-of-Year Self Assessment, we asked each member of the collaborative group to answer this question. Here is what they had to say.

-I'm most proud of having actually made it this far...without feeling like I have failed completely. During my student

## Classroom Inquiry Projects

Classroom inquiry projects provide an opportunity for each teacher to focus her inquiry on the needs of her practice in the context of her school. While many of these questions have been asked before, these projects enable these teachers to build their own local knowledge and understanding. Educators use several terms to refer to the process of educational practitioners systematically studying their own practice, which differ slightly in meaning but all share three fundamental assumptions: (a) research starts from where the action is; (b) the practitioner's practical wisdom is a central source of knowledge; and (c) research leads to personal and social change as well as to curricular and instructional change (Hollingsworth & Sockett, 1994, p.9). Through the generosity of the Auerbach Foundation, we were able to offer mini-grants (\$100 each) to these first-year teachers to support their classroom inquiry projects and the students they teach. The following are the individual project titles and inquiry project questions.

### **Susan, 7th grade teacher, M.Ed.**

#### *What "types" of lessons motivate seventh graders?*

How should I pace my lessons? How can I use more hands-on activities? What do seventh graders like to do?

### **Kim, 1st grade teacher, B.A. & Elementary education** *Getting to know Ms. Phillips*

What can my role be in development of community and individual responsibility among my students? Who is Ms. Phillips in this [teacher] role?

### **Laura, 9th-12th English teacher, M.Ed.**

#### *Creative learning in a standards mandated world*

How can a teacher both adhere to a strict curriculum and incorporate creative learning?

### **Leslie, 9th-12th English teacher, B.A.**

#### *Teaching from within*

How much of teaching and learning needs to come from within?

### **Brian, 9th & 11th grade English teacher, B.A. & Secondary Education**

#### *Classroom management*

## Grants

We are deeply grateful to the Auerbach Foundation for awarding us our first major grant of \$10,000. This seed money has made this, our second year possible as it provided us a financial base on which to establish our footing.

After establishing a small history with our \$500 community grant and receiving positive feedback, but no awards, we are thrilled to have had the support of the Auerbach Foundation. This grant, along with the generous gifts of people like you, makes The Teachers' Loft work possible.

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### ***We ask you to support the work of The Teachers' Loft today because...***

There is a historical need for opportunities where teachers can be stewards of their own professional development. Where teachers can be proficient AND passionate about their own learning. Where teachers can learn to cultivate skills AND encourage imagination in their students.

Teachers' responsibilities and roles continue to intensify while opportunities and funding for collaborative, reflective professional development are diminishing. Unlike traditional school-based professional development, The Teachers' Loft seeks to provide our area's newest teachers with a third space for meeting with their peers and for reflecting on their teaching and learning. This space, separate from school and teacher preparation programs, is a place unburdened by the pervasiveness of school-based culture and politics. By continuing their stance as students of teaching and learning, beginning teachers are able to freely cultivate their professional discourse, their reflexivity, their pedagogical beliefs, and their hope in what is possible not only for themselves but for the children they teach.

feeling like I have failed completely. During my student teaching it seemed impossible to me.

-I am proud of some of the connections I've made with students. I believe there are some students who come into my classroom wondering, and actually looking forward to what my class will offer them today.

-[My] creative approach to teaching—assignments with variety and fun opportunity for students to be creative too.

-Surviving! That, and the fact that I do enjoy the work. I'm not filled with resentment nor the idea that I need to find a new career.

-[Now] in May, still feeling like this is a good place to be, both in vocation and at this particular school. I've come to realize that I will miss my kids! I'm proud that I was able to manage the classes okay—something I was very concerned about early on.

-I am proud that I have connected with my students...

### ***So what is this comprehensive Induction?***

Comprehensive Induction is a multifaceted approach to supporting the personal and professional development of new teachers. A new teacher's transition from a teacher preparation program to classroom teaching is fraught with complexity. The demands placed on beginning teachers are exacerbated by the latest bad news concerning public schools; reduced funding and on-going budget cuts limiting opportunities such as music and art, larger class size and high-stakes accountability systems which set the tone of compliance and punishment for adults and children alike.

At The Teachers' Loft we provide a space and forums for new teachers to continue learning, grapple with their complex roles as educators and develop their professional identity. Peer support and classroom inquiry in a collaborative setting are important components of a comprehensive induction program.

#### **• Isolation to collaboration**

- developing professional discourse
- continuing to be students of teaching
- fostering professional optimism

#### **• Third space (schools, universities, non-profits)**

- non-evaluative & responsive
- separate from school cultures
- promotes an inquiry stance

#### **• "set-up for success"**

- individualized attention to teaching practice
- responsive readings
- attention to "usual suspects"
- inquiry project scaffolding and funding

What classroom practices are conducive to learning and discipline?

#### **Sarah, , 9th-12th English teacher, M.Ed.**

##### ***Motivating "lower level" students***

How can I motivate students in my lower level classes and challenge the students who need it without leaving others behind?

#### **Tina, 9th-11th grade English teacher, M.Ed.**

##### ***Incorporating technology in the English classroom***

How can I include technology in my teaching with limited resources?

### **The Center School Collaborative Group**

In December 2003, we began working with the entire faculty of The Center School in Holyoke, MA, an independent school that meets the needs of severely emotionally, mentally, and/or behaviorally challenged youth, aged 5-21. This year we are continuing our monthly collaborative work with this same group of 15 teachers. Our work together continues to be grounded in responsive readings, discussion, reflective writing, and classroom inquiry projects. We are excited to have the opportunity to sustain this type of "long-term" professional development relationship with a faculty of teachers as it enables us to expand on the work we began together last year. Without question our work with this group of teachers has reinforced our belief that all teachers should have thoughtful professional development available to them if progress is to be made inside and outside their classroom walls.

For this spring, in partnership with The Center School, we have proposed a workshop for a state-wide conference. This workshop will provide an opportunity for some teachers to present their perspectives on the collaborative, inquiry-based work they will have done for nearly two years. It is also a welcome opportunity to exhibit both The Teachers' Loft and The Center School's commitment to collaborative professional development.

## **TAX RECEIPT**

*Please retain this for your records.*

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

AMT. \_\_\_\_\_

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**THE TEACHERS' LOFT:**  
116 PLEASANT ST., SUITE 2312  
EASTHAMPTON, MA 01027

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