

Great Teachers
and Leaders
are the Heart of
Great Schools

Annual Newsletter

Focusing Teacher Leadership on Culturally Responsive Instruction

By Monica Nachemja-Bunton, UVEI Faculty and Action Research Coach



Above, Stephanie Herald with other MEd candidates in the Action Research Cohort.

MEd Degrees at UVEI

- ✓ Degree candidates advance and deepen their skills in teaching, teacher leadership, school leadership, or literacy teaching or leadership
- ✓ All degree candidates take action to solve practical problems in their schools
- ✓ Degree programs are designed for working educators

IN 2020, sparked by the police killing of George Floyd, schools around the country were having conversations around what it means to welcome, validate, and affirm all students of all backgrounds. At the Bernice A. Ray School in Hanover, NH, these conversations gave Stephanie Herald, a 5th grade teacher, an opportunity to engage more deeply with her colleagues around principles she had been incorporating into her own teaching.

Stephanie decided to seek her MEd degree focusing on these ideas. During the 2022-2023 school year she took a sabbatical to complete an MEd in Teacher Leadership through UVEI, focusing her work on supporting teachers in developing culturally relevant and responsive instructional units.

Two components of UVEI's MEd program – advanced leadership practices and action research – supported Stephanie as she delved into this work. Building and examining her practices of facilitation, instructional coaching, and data-based curricular leadership were directly tied to her efforts to support her colleagues. "It made me think about how I used my time, and how I can make my work truly collaborative." Action research, in which educators first identify and research a problem of practice before beginning to think of solutions,

also had a direct application to her work. With a problem of practice of identifying professional development principles to support educators in implementing culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, Steph set out to work with a third grade team as they modified and taught a unit to their classes.

Now, one year later, she continues to reflect on this work as part of the larger picture. "After the PD work I did with them, they were really able to see why that work was important," she said. And after finishing work on one unit, they have also been implementing ideas for future units.

Stephanie is putting her own advanced leadership skills into practice to advance this work. This year she is collaborating with the school librarian and ELA coordinator on PD, looking at text selection with diverse learners in mind. They are utilizing each educator's unique knowledge set: the librarian knows what teachers are checking out and what's not being used, and is intentionally adding diverse texts to the school's classroom library as well as recommending great books that help reach the goals of educators and students; the ELA coordinator is an expert in understanding how to support learners in reaching the standards; and Stephanie is asking questions around bringing in books that are more diverse while meeting the reading objectives and needs of students.

Stephanie Herald earned an MEd to support teachers in developing culturally relevant and responsive instructional units.



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MESSAGE FROM UVEI'S PRESIDENT Page Tompkins, EdD

A Celebration of Learning

ON A RAINY SATURDAY MORNING in early June 2023, it would have been tempting for educators to sleep in. Instead, a group of about 100 educators and community members gathered at Lake Morey Resort for UVEI's End-of-Year Celebration of Learning. This inaugural event brought together our licensure program cohorts – principals, teachers, and literacy educators – to share their learning with each other and with the UVEI community. Presentations followed themes such as building capacity for social and emotional learning, professional learning and collaboration, and making learning visible.

This was a powerful opportunity to understand multiple perspectives and learn from one another. For instance, principal candidate Carrie Brennan (Thetford Academy) was able to attend the presentation of the "Many Hats of a Literacy Specialist" given by the 2023 Literacy Educators cohort. Carrie reflected afterwards, "I soaked up a lot of important research and insights about the teaching of literacy. Secondary level educators don't often focus as much as we ought to on the fundamentals of reading instruction and skills. I got to know each of the literacy educator candidates through our joint seminars

Literacy Educators Program

- ✓ Candidates advance and deepen skills in literacy instruction, assessment, intervention, and leadership, leading to literacy specialist licensure
- ✓ Candidates build strong relationships with fellow literacy educators as well as with other school leaders and classroom teachers
- ✓ Program is designed for working educators with a special interest in literacy

earlier in the year, so I especially appreciated reconnecting and learning from the culmination of their work together."

In the afternoon, each cohort celebrated their accomplishments, closing the program year together with appreciations, stories, cohort rituals, and a few tears; and invited family members to share in their accomplishments. Learning together in a cohort is a centerpiece of the UVEI experience, and for us it is a privilege to be a part of their shared journey.

"I got to know each of the literacy educator candidates through our joint seminars earlier in the year, so I especially appreciated reconnecting and learning from the culmination of their work together."

— CARRIE BRENNAN, PIP '23



2023 literacy graduates with program coordinator Kristen Liu, far left.

School Leaders Overcoming Workforce Challenges

by Elijah Hawkes, UVEI Director for School Leadership, and Chris Ward, UVEI Academic Dean and Coordinator of Graduate Studies

AS PART OF OUR INQUIRY into today's educator workforce challenges, UVEI faculty conducted a series of discussions and school visits last year. One of several highlights was a visit to Richford Elementary School, in northern Vermont. Richford principal Kelli Dean, PIP and MEd '12, is a graduate of our principal program, and literacy specialist Katie Charron, MEd '24, is working towards her MEd in Teacher Leadership with us. Like many rural schools, Richford is not immune to workforce challenges, but we witnessed many effective strategies that are making a difference – in both hiring and retaining teachers.

Support for a Positive School Climate

Richford has a student support team to systematize routines and expectations across the school and to provide support for classroom teachers whenever concerns arise. One of the newer and younger teachers we interviewed has experienced this support first hand. She knows that when someone is in need of support – whether a student or an educator – their needs will be responded to effectively. In addition to the formal support team, teachers value their daily collaborations and relationships as colleagues. These support systems require commitment and an intentional allocation of resources, and it is clear that they are having an impact.

Support for Teacher Collaboration

Collaboration at Richford takes many forms, from informal daily interactions to formal meetings. We asked a group of teachers to describe “a recent time when you were problem-solving with colleagues, and you felt like your voice mattered and was included.” Notably, each person described something that had just happened earlier that day. Kelli maintains this culture of collaboration with co-teaching and classroom support roles, scheduled collaboration time amongst teams, and meeting routines that promote connection and problem solving. The formal meetings are run by facilitators,



Richford teachers
at a team meeting

like Katie, who leads the Kindergarten team for literacy. These leaders are part of their own team of facilitators, creating opportunities for support and learning.

The Principal Matters

Kelli's approach to leadership is to distribute it among educators, not only those holding positions of formal authority. In fact, when asked about teacher leadership in the school, Kelli began by naming many of the places she's “not much involved.” This included the school-wide community meeting of students that was taking place that day, team meetings facilitated by teacher leaders, and community-building efforts such as pot-luck lunches and breakfasts for teachers. But it was clear from our visit that when Kelli thought her vision and leadership were important, she was present, from leadership team meetings and student support team meetings, to curriculum conversations on topics such as early literacy success.

Research-based Practices

UVEI faculty recently read the new book, “Where Teachers Thrive: Organizing Schools For Success,” by Susan Moore Johnson. We were particularly struck by

Principal Intern Program

- ✓ Candidates develop and deepen skills in school leadership and management, teacher learning, curricular leadership and school climate
- ✓ Candidates pursue principal licensure and can add a curriculum director license specialization
- ✓ Program is designed for educators in a variety of leadership roles

what Johnson's research affirms about the importance of addressing student conduct and needs, providing time and support for collaboration, and involving teachers in decision making. The practices we saw at Richford align well with this research. These are not magic solutions to workforce woes – Kelli acknowledges that recruitment for this rural school will remain a challenge. As Johnson writes, it is only when our society acknowledges and funds the costs of a first-class education system that our schools and teachers will succeed in providing it. In the meantime, what one sees at Richford, and in other schools in the UVEI network, shows that strong, collaborative leadership can make a difference in keeping educators in the workforce and creating schools where adults and students can thrive.



Teaching Problem Solving and Climate Justice

by Elijah Hawkes, TIP faculty instructor, and Chris Ward, TIP faculty coach

UVEI DOES NOT OPERATE IN A VACUUM; in fact, we seek to collaborate with schools and organizations whenever possible. In our Teacher Intern Program (TIP), collaborators have included area principals who join our principal panels and mock interviews, educators in schools that we visit and observe, and, now, a group called Regeneration Corps (RC), which supports schools in environmental studies. RC's mission is "to support youth with the knowledge and skills to mitigate and respond to climate change and its constituent impacts, while building community resilience and strengthening local food systems."



Joining us at a February seminar were Karen Ganey and Cat Buxton, two members of Regeneration Corps who have experience working with schools in the Upper Valley. Cat told us about her work on the Super Compost Project at Thetford Elementary School, where students help manage thousands of pounds of food waste every year. We learned about the concept of a "just transition," which RC describes as a "transformation of our society that seeks to put humanity into a harmonic balance with the earth."

Cat and Karen also introduced us to the concept of "multisolving," which can help us explore solutions to a wide variety of problems, contemplating the connections that any problem may have to different aspects of our human and natural communities. It can help show how looking for solutions in one area can have a big impact elsewhere. To demonstrate this, Karen and Cat led us through two case studies chosen by the TIP cohort, based on experiences our candidates have had in schools: trauma-informed practices and deeper connections between schools, families, and communities. As we asked questions like: What problems need to be solved in our community? Who has lived experience we can learn from? Who should make the decisions? and Who will benefit from the decisions?, we saw how these questions are relevant to problem-solving in any domain and are especially important as our communities seek to address climate change.

The cohort discussed how we can bring this problem solving framework to students, whether during project-based learning units or elsewhere, and how it may be useful in collaborating with colleagues. Abbie Castriotta, a TIP candidate and sustainable agriculture educator at Woodstock Union High School,

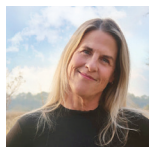
helped UVEI faculty plan the afternoon and pointed out how valuable a systems-thinking or multisolving approach is for students to experience and practice. It is the "the ultimate transferable skill," Abbie said. "Ensuring that students have systems thinking/multisolving in their tool belts when they leave school will help them to find solutions that will make the world a better place."

Above, TIP candidates practicing use of multisolving framework

Teacher Intern Program

- ✓ Candidates develop and deepen skills in lesson planning, engaging students, and building positive classroom environments; leading to teacher licensure
- ✓ Focuses on experiential learning, supported by strong mentoring and coaching
- ✓ Designed for aspiring teachers, working teachers, and paraprofessionals

Alumni News



Elena Burch, TIP '12, is a board-certified behavior analyst. "Helping people overcome extreme problem behaviors and

guiding them to express themselves, whether through vocal language or AAC devices, is fun and inspiring." She recently developed an online class in behavior analysis for teachers and caregivers.

Elysia Burroughs, TIP '12, has taught biology at Kimball Union Academy for 11 years. She is the Science Department Chair and co-director of the STEM Scholar Program. She's also working on an MS in Science Education at Montana State.

Justin Cassarino, PIP and MEd '21, is the principal of the Walpole Attendance Area and will receive the A+ Administrator Award this spring from the New England League of Middle Schools.

Loretta Cruz, TIP '04/PIP '18, is in her third year as principal at Newbury Elementary School (VT). She is a member of Waddington Leadership Cohort '14.

Joseph Donarum, PIP '16, retired from a career in school administration in Vermont and relocated back to the Upper Valley where he teaches psychology and provides academic support through structured study tutorials at Kimball Union Academy.



Mihaela LaRoche, TIP '15, has taught world languages in three NH public schools since acquiring a world language

endorsement. She teaches French at Marion Cross School in Norwich, VT, and is a member of the Pi Delta Phi Honorary Society NH chapter.

Bill Loynds, TIP '13, started a new job this year teaching 6th grade social studies at Indian River School in Canaan, NH.

Alexis Nelson Schleicher, TIP '10, will be working as the humanities teacher at the New England School of the Arts in Lebanon, NH. She is looking forward to the arts focus, the individualized nature of the programs, and the unique city-as-a-school model that the school will be using.

Amanda Tyrrell, PIP '21 and MEd '22, began the school year as assistant principal at Elm Hill School (Springfield, VT) and is now acting principal. Amanda values the hands-on work that she did at UVEI and writes "I love my school, the faculty and staff, and all of the students. I look forward to the work I do every day."

Cory Valentine, MEd '19, is the high school mathematics teacher at Ashuelot Valley Academy, part of Mount Prospect Academy, a therapeutic special education school in Keene, NH.

Carrie Fitz (left), TIP '21 and MEd '24, and **Aimee Gonzalez**, TIP '22 and MEd '23, have both received fellowships to work with UVEI's Barnes Initiative for Collaborative Learning, exploring teacher collaboration and its impact on educator support and retention. They are joining UVEI faculty, UVEI principal candidates, and other area educators to identify collective needs and test out collective solutions in their schools. Aimee teaches French and math at Crossroads Academy in Lyme, NH, and Carrie is a special educator at East Montpelier Elementary School in VT.

Read more about working with multilingual learners, the Barnes Initiative for Collaborative Learning, and other UVEI alumni at www.uvei.edu/resources.

Amy DeMatteo, Literacy '23, is an ESL teacher in the Hartford School district in VT. Last year she collaborated with UVEI faculty coach Monica Nachemja-Bunton on publishing strategies for working with multilingual learners that can be used by UVEI teacher candidates as well as other educators in the UVEI network.



Collaboration continues this year, focused on working with families, and is also assisted by **Fabiola Hammond**, TIP '23 and MEd '24, who teaches second grade at the Dothan Brook School in Hartford. Fabi, who lived in both Brazil and Canada before moving to the US, now also volunteers her time to support Portuguese-speaking students and families from around the district.



Congratulations to the UVEI alumni who have earned MEd degrees through UVEI this year.

MEd Teaching:

- Lisa Dawn Glidewell, TIP '21
- Jake Parker, TIP '15
- Ethan Watson, TIP '22
- Aimee Gonzalez, TIP '22

MEd School Leadership:

- Alexis Leclair, PIP '23
- Kevin Hicks, PIP '23
- Theresa Risdal, PIP '22

John Vorder Bruegge, TIP '10, is wrapping up more than 11 years as a correctional educator at the Southern State Correctional Facility in Springfield, VT.

Christina Wild, TIP '07, moved to Duluth, MN, from the UV in 2022 and completed her doctorate in October. Her dissertation explores the experience of nature-based educators in Duluth, and nature-based education's influence on working conditions and retention. She is the lead educator for a nature-based preschool program.

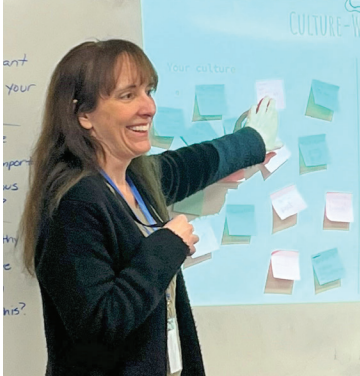




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