

Finding Space and Place for Young Adult Literature:

Lessons from Four First-Year Teachers Engaging in Out-of-School Professional Induction

Despite research and anecdotal evidence suggesting the value of young adult literature in the school setting, the genre continues to be marginalized and avoided in many classrooms (Glenn, 2007; Baker, 2002; Bean & Moni, 2003; Cadden, 2000; Emge, 2006; Moorman, 2008; Stevens & Bean, 2007).

Arguments surrounding issues of literary quality, controversial content, and the external pressures faced by teachers in a climate of accountability hinder attempts by teachers to bring YA titles to students who need and deserve them. For first-year teachers navigating new settings and new curricula and negotiating new relationships fraught with issues of power and authority (Arends, R. I., & Rigazio-DiGilio, A. J., 2000; Brown, 2000; Gold, 1996; Grossman, 1990; Kane, 1991; Lortie, 1975; Moir, E., 2003; Moir, E., & Gless, J., 2001; Ryan, 1970; Ryan et al., 1980; Veenman, 1984; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998), the decision to utilize YA texts involves even higher stakes.

Through professional conversations formalized in conferences and joint-publication ventures, well-informed, caring, and committed beginning teachers might find support in their persistent efforts to do right by their students. This paper features four first-year teachers doing just that, enacting innovative, creative, and unconventional practices and strategies that put YA titles in the hands of kids, even in the face of sometimes loud and persistent opposition, highlighting not only their work in the classroom but the out-of-school professional development activities that

supported their efforts.

Writing and YA Literature in an Age of Assessment: Danielle's Lesson

The process of reading provides a means to enhance students' creative and expository writing skills (Glenn, 2007; Fearn & Farnan, 2001; Garrigues, 2004; Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Hansen, 2001; Langer 1986; Mayo, 2000; Tierney & Shanahan, 1991). One of the most effective ways to encourage young people to develop as authors is to allow them to examine the craft of writing as utilized by authors they respect and admire, particularly contemporary authors who address issues similar to those students face in their lives and often process in their writing. By focusing on the elements of writing craft employed by these authors, students are able to apply and adapt these strategies to their own writing, gaining necessary skills and confidence (and, incidentally, performing just fine on state and national exams of writing and reading competence).

Danielle teaches in a small, suburban town in New England. Her school community is made up of approximately 600 students and 60 faculty members. Her school building is an older facility, with chalkboards and only one computer in many of the classrooms. While technological resources may be hard to come by, her staff members and administration are exceptionally supportive of her ideas and desire to infuse the curriculum with new YA texts. With their trust and support, Danielle has successfully incorpo-

rated several YA titles into her sophomore and senior curricula. The challenge she continually faces, however, is teaching these novels to her students while still making successful efforts to improve standardized test scores in reading and writing, a task for which she is held accountable within the school community.

In balancing the importance of teaching YA novels with that of student performance on mandated standardized state tests, Danielle implements a modified version of Reader's Workshop. Her students choose Reader's Workshop books based on their personal interests, as well as peer and teacher recommendations. To supplement the existing curriculum, Danielle's honors students read two books per quarter, while her college-prep students read one. Danielle's classroom library is stocked with YA titles she has acquired through the years from bookstores, the annual NCTE and ALAN conferences, and anywhere else she can. Danielle also works closely with the school librarian. She shares with him the titles of books and the names of the authors her students are currently enamored of, and he makes lists of books to order each month. If students express an interest in checking out books by a particular author, and they are already signed out of the classroom library, she is able to refer them to the school library, confidently knowing that her librarian has a strong knowledge base in the field of YA literature, as well as several titles on his shelves.

Each Friday, Danielle's students enter class excited for Reader's Workshop to begin. They take out their "Reader's Workshop Focus Points" worksheet (see Appendix A) and copy down the focus point of the day (setting, character development, symbolism, etc.). After jotting down the day's focus point, students record any background knowledge they already have about that particular literary term. Next, Danielle conducts a brief mini-lesson on the term to fill in any gaps in each of the student's current knowledge. The students take notes during the mini-lesson, adding to the worksheet which will ultimately serve as a resource guide. For the next thirty minutes, students read silently as Danielle travels around her classroom and confers with individual students about their selected titles. While the students are reading, their task is to focus on how their respective author uses the element selected as the focus point for the day. At

the end of the block of reading time, students write for ten minutes about how their author utilized the literary device or element of author's craft in the reading and evaluate whether or not the author used the element effectively.

Through this process of critically examining how the students' favorite authors use these elements of craft, the students come to understand them on a much deeper level. This understanding becomes especially important when students are faced with high performance goals on statewide standardized reading tests that ask them to reflect on a close reading of a text, analyzing author's intent, effectiveness, and overall success in creating an effective piece of literature. Many students struggle to determine what makes a piece of literature "good" or "effective" or how to pull apart pieces of a text to analyze the author's intent and use of literary devices. Through the focus points that Danielle uses in her Reader's Workshop, she is able to teach students these aspects of close reading and effective writing through books that capture their interest by authors whom they admire. When faced with the broad and often daunting questions about overall quality of a text, students have a bank of "focus points" from which to draw as a result of the work they have done in Reader's Workshop.

The final component in Danielle's Reader's Workshop process involves having her students use their notes on how various authors used different literary elements in the consideration of their own writing. When students struggle with a writing assignment, Danielle first asks them to look back at their evaluations of how their authors dealt with

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specific issues, like beginning or ending a story, effectively using dialogue or foreshadowing, for example, to garner strategies or approaches they, themselves, might employ. During her short story unit, one of Danielle's students used her examination of Sarah Dessen's character development techniques to work toward creating her own memorable characters.

As a result of the Reader's Workshop process, Danielle's students prepare themselves for the state standardized tests in reading and writing. More importantly, they learn important literary devices beyond the terminology; they understand how they are used. In turn, students are able to apply this knowledge to their own writing. Most importantly, students gain confidence in both their reading and writing abilities, thus increasing their self-efficacy and passion for the English Language Arts.

Independent Reading in an Age of Fiscal Limits and Packed Curricula: Kate's Lesson

Most educators long for students to be intrinsically motivated to pick up a book and read for pleasure, and multiple independent reading programs have been designed and implemented by teachers in the attempt to meet that goal (Allington, 2002; Katz, 2005; Robb, 2002; Waff & Connell, 2004). These approaches, however, are sometimes avoided by classroom teachers due to the perceived complications that result from limited resources and classroom time and a lack of vision as to what might be possible.

Kate teaches high school English in a sleepy shoreline town in New England where her students range from reluctant, disengaged readers to voracious lovers of the written word. Spanning two grades and three course levels, Kate's students vary in both learning ability and motivation level. Teaching in a small district with a limited allotment of resources and a lofty curriculum that leaves little room for supplemental programs, Kate developed and currently implements an independent reading program that relies upon the creation of a classroom library shelved with fresh YA titles along with partnered support from the town and school libraries. Understanding the importance of instilling interest and curiosity in prospective readers, Kate initiated her program by pairing book talks and read-alouds with jaw-dropping

facts on the correlation between independent reading and literacy rates. Students could not believe that "the percentage of 17-year-olds who read nothing for pleasure has doubled in a decade," and they were equally amazed that "reading scores for 17-year olds are down significantly" (CEA Advisor). By sharing this information, she confirmed the importance of independent reading for the present bookworms and sparked motivation in the more reluctant book-openers.

From the start, Kate's department and library staff members were exceptionally supportive of her ambition to implement an independent reading program with her students. Upon arriving at her new school, Kate found that the English department had recently established a Book Chat program; students were afforded the opportunity to showcase their recommended titles on a library book shelf with an enthusiastic blurb as to why this text was one to read. Excited by the exhibit—and seeing its potential connection to her project—Kate shared her ambition with the library specialist and department chair to build upon the established interest in independent reading to her classroom and curriculum. Grounding her rationale to implement an independent reading program with sound theory, passion, and the promise to authentically create, implement, and reflect on the product and process, Kate was able to successfully gain the support of both the English and library/media departments. While the library personnel continued to provide additions to the selection of available YA books, Kate created her own classroom library which primarily included YA titles guaranteed to get students reading. Initially, if Kate's shelves did not house a title that a student was curious about, she bought it. It was not a matter of expense; the independent reading program was a vehicle to allow every kid to love a book, and Kate's role was to ensure that every kid found one to love.

Today, students elbow each other at the classroom library bookshelves as they eagerly sign out titles for the third marking period. Already proficient in the independent reading process, the students get right to work. Between now and the end of the quarter, each student will read a book of his or her choice, logging the place, time, and number of pages read as part of an initiative to discover and reflect on who they are as readers (see Appendix B). Once they have finished

their books, students will create authentic products that demonstrate their personal connections with and understanding of the text, showcase their strengths and interests as readers, and highlight significant themes and elements of the story. Kate has found that the quality of the work submitted each quarter exceeds her expectations. From ingenious comic strips that retell a portion of a story through detailed drawings to a letter written to an author from the perspective of a publisher accepting or rejecting a book for publication, students produce projects that genuinely display their investment in the stories read. Both stressing to students the importance of choosing titles that are truly interesting to them and providing them with the creative freedom to express themselves and what they take away from the reading produce powerful results.

Kids want to read when the environment which surrounds them values reading as relevant and the content as real. Embedding lesson initiations with references to a YA title has an effect. Recently, Kate began a lesson on characterization in *Fahrenheit 451* by reading the first chapter of Jerry Spinelli's *Stargirl* aloud to her students, asking, "What connections do we see between Stargirl and Clarisse McClellan? How do the students at Stargirl's school respond to her unique character and why?" Consistent references to YA literature and independent reading texts make the act of reading by oneself less foreign, less daunting. Exposing students to fresh, young, relevant titles through these means allows these adolescent readers to broaden their pool of possible must reads. Both deliberate exposure and word-of-mouth hype are helpful vehicles for increasing interest in and frequency of reading. Some of Kate's biggest allies are her students. When a student finishes a book that he or she "just couldn't put down," word spreads to other students, friend-to-friend recommendations are made, and students ask to put their books on the shelves of the classroom library because others "have to read it!"

Kate's classroom library has grown significantly since the start of the school year; the group of fifty or so books that she contributed has expanded to include two floor-to-ceiling shelves that house additional purchases along with books donated by students. The argument that limited funds hinder independent reading has not panned out in this classroom. Kate

credits this to her persistent efforts to inspire curiosity and interest. There is no better motivator than a student ranting and raving about how awesome a book is; others want to read it. Students ask to borrow the book that everyone's talking about. A student asks a parent to bring him or her to the bookstore to pick up that book or another that he or she thinks may be just as big of a hit. All that any one student needs to become an avid reader, or even a less reluctant one, is to have a positive experience and a meaningful connection with a book he/she likes. Kate's mission has been and continues to be showing kids that those books exist.

What about the curriculum? The 58 minute class period? How can time be spent on pleasure reading when the students are bogged down with homework each night? All fabulous questions, each warranted given the high stakes teachers face today. The implementation of an independent reading program need not impede a curriculum, nor must it regularly occur during class time (although it certainly might). Introducing the program requires some direct instruction and class time for preparation and clarification. However, the adoption of any independent reading program must be seen as a long term investment. Kids will require a significant amount of cheerleading; they may need encouragement and assistance when choosing a book and teacher leadership in the creation of a classroom culture in which independent reading is integral, a constant in their academic routine. With time, stu-

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YA Texts in an Age of Conservatism: Jill's Lesson

Both classic and traditional literatures often address controversial ideas and topics, but, because classic texts have an accepted place in literary history, the material is often considered educational and safe for students. Writers of YA literature regularly explore the reality of being a teenager today, and issues of sexuality, violence, drugs, and depression frequently

emerge. Without the weight of history behind them, YA titles and their authors more readily come under attack (Alsup, 2003; Author, 2006; Stallworth, B., Gibbons, L., & Fauber, L., 2006; Glasgow, 2001). However, with commitment, care, and clear justification, teachers can navigate this potentially contentious territory.

Jill teaches sixth and eighth grade Language Arts at a fundamental school in St. Petersburg, Florida. Students elect to attend the school from around the county. While the socio-economic status of enrolled students varies greatly, one thing binds members of the school community together: a commitment to education based on responsibility, community, and respect. Administrators and

teachers work closely to foster meaningful learning opportunities for students, ranging from organized author visits to cross-curricular fieldtrips. The district is committed to making learning meaningful, and this sentiment is shared by parents and community.

Despite this support, however, teachers may still face challenges when bringing YA literature into the classroom. There are many ways to face this challenge and find common ground between the new and the traditional so that all students can benefit.

Choosing appropriate YA texts for use in the classroom can be tricky, particularly for newer teachers or those less familiar with the myriad titles that have been and continue to be published in the field. Parental and collegial scrutiny can also be rather intimidating. A necessary first step is to read any YA title before considering its use or recommending it to students. While pre-reading the book, teachers might pay particular attention to potential student connections to characters (age, setting, experiences, culture), writer's craft (perspective, word choice, sentence fluency, voice), community issues (environmental, political, social), and values emphasized by the book (cultural, traditional, historical, international). In addition, teachers might check with the school librarian to see if the book is cleared for all students to read in accordance with any school/district book selection guidelines, as some books may be limited to certain ages or grades or may require written informed parent consent. Teachers might also draw upon online resources, such as Amazon.com, to read reviews to garner multiple perspectives regarding appropriateness of content and recommended age group. With these components in place, an informed decision can be made.

Some people might ask, "Why go to all this trouble? Just draw from tried and true classic titles." In response, teachers might draw from several lines of thought. From a language perspective, for example, YA titles might encourage student admission into the reading process. Classic literature can feature dated language that leaves struggling readers behind and unmotivated. YA literature, in contrast, often incorporates more contemporary forms of the English language, thus providing a perfect opportunity to draw from samples of classic literature to compare language use and track its changes over time. YA literature can also be used to teach conventions of language, supporting students' understandings of how language works while keeping them interested in the content being read. YA texts often incorporate technology and communication, including e-mails, texts, blogs, and IM, the very language forms that students increasingly

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value. Although teachers might not feel knowledgeable about these forms, their students love to share their culture; if teachers struggle with the slang in the text, students will gladly don the role of expert and teach them! Perhaps even more significantly, many YA authors are alive and available to talk to students about issues of language and writer's craft; many will visit schools, hold online chats, answer letters, post to blogs, etc. In fact, once Jill and a group of students looked up a poet in an online phonebook, called, and got their question answered in a matter of 10 minutes. Talk about authentic learning.

With respect to motivation, teachers should consider ways in which they might capitalize on the taboo nature of YA titles. Just as some have argued that parental restriction was the best thing to happen to rock music sales ("The History of the PMRC"), it could be claimed that reluctant readers may be intrigued by controversial books that they can relate to. Case in point: one of Jill's students reported that she hated to read but would try an MTV series book, assuming that the title would resonate with her contemporary interests. Having previously used Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* successfully, Jill believed this to be a suitable choice for the student. Before checking the novel out of her classroom library, Jill sent home a parent note with reviews of the book and her own review listing the potentially controversial issues. The parents signed off, and the student has since finished the book and moved on to additional texts. To demonstrate the power of these titles despite (or because of) the controversial issues they address—and to foster literacy in the larger community—teachers might extend the invitation beyond a simple granting of permission and invite parents/guardians to read a YA text along with their children.

Thematic Units in an Age of the Shackled Curriculum: Erica's Lesson

Thematic units provide an innovative, interdisciplinary, and richly complicated way to feature YA texts in the classroom (Glenn 2008, 2003a, 2003b; Beane, 1995; Drake, 1998; Monseau, 1992). Educators can develop thematic units that relate and appeal to adolescents, focusing on such high-interest and relevant adolescent themes as identity, perceptions, or

attraction. In the exploration of the given theme, the YA text plays a central role in supporting reading, writing, thinking, and speaking skills among students, all while creating opportunities for students to deepen and enrich their understanding of big ideas, themselves, and others. If we, as teachers, are committed to fostering a stance toward life-long learning, we are obligated to make space in our curricula for opportunities to engage students and encourage meaningful connections to literature, even in school settings that require particular texts and/or adhere to an established curriculum.

Erica teaches at a comprehensive four-year high school in New England that draws students from two towns that vary significantly with respect to socioeconomic status. District leaders have identified student achievement as a primary goal. In 2006, the district was the only school in the state removed from the list of schools identified as "In Need of Improvement" as per *No Child Left Behind* legislation. The high school English curriculum is comprised of year-long, required grade level courses. Each year-long course focuses on differing aspects in the English content area. For example, all sophomores are required to read John Hersey's *Hiroshima* and write a persuasive essay that aligns with the interdisciplinary portion of the state standardized assessment. The college-level sophomore curriculum also includes required short story and poetry units. There are optional class sets of a few additional texts available to teachers: *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Man a la Mancha*, *Les Miserables*, *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, and *Julius Caesar*. With the creative infusion of YA titles into the existing units of study, Erica has successfully broadened the reach and scope of the content to which her students are exposed.

For example, with the generous financial support of the department head, Erica incorporated Ben Mikaelson's *Tree Girl* into an existing and required multicultural unit. Using *Tree Girl* as the vehicle, students analyzed the larger constructs of social and cultural justice. They compared the plight of Mikaelson's protagonist, Gabriela, with the problems of other characters they read about in the unit, including both classical and contemporary multicultural stories, and examined their visions of self by researching and discovering works written by those who share their cultural identities. Using "Project

Implicit” (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>), students explored their own subconscious feelings toward particular races or cultures. Paul Kivel’s “Examining Class and Race: an Exercise” offered meaningful opportunities for students to discover disparities in the race and class differences within the

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Using Don Gallo’s short story collection, *Destination Unexpected*, Erica also enhanced the short story unit for her tenth graders, opting to organize the readings around the thematic construct of adventure. Erica and her students examined both classic and contemporary YA stories to

consider how the theme has evolved in literary permutations over time (all while meeting school requirements in the process; the short stories in the curriculum are suggested, and the literary terms are required). Using mini-lessons to elucidate key literary terms evident in the stories (plot structure, foreshadowing, and characterization), Erica enhanced student learning by couching the language study in literature centered on themes related to their lives. The stories “Keep Smiling,” by Alex Flinn, and “Bad Blood,” by Will Weaver, promoted particularly rich class discussion about what it means to be a good person and whether or not intention should figure into the definition.

Building a bridge between the classics and more contemporary titles in the context of the thematic unit allowed for richer discussion around an important

question that was applicable to students’ lives. In the employment of the thematic approach, teachers might begin by providing students numerous pieces of literature that examine the same theme from multiple perspectives. If *Romeo and Juliet* is the required text, for example, a teacher could explore the theme of forbidden love drawing from such YA texts as *Lucas*, by Kevin Brooks; *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer; *Romiette and Julio*, by Sharon Draper; *Annie on my Mind*, by Nancy Garden; and *If You Come Softly*, by Jacqueline Woodson. *If You Come Softly* presents a forbidden love between individuals of a different race, while *Twilight* reflects the love between a mortal and an immortal. Teachers might then look to literature circles as an instructional approach that encourages students to discuss how the given theme is presented in the YA text and how this contrasts and connects to the original required text, *Romeo and Juliet*. The teacher may also supplement the unit with YA poetry, short stories, novels in verse, images, and nonfiction texts (see Marion Dane Bauer’s collection of short stories, *Am I Blue? Coming out from the Silence*, and David Levithan’s novel in verse, *The Realm of Possibility*, as a way to draw students into the theme before ever cracking the cover of the required core text.

Designing the literature curriculum thematically from questions of high interest for adolescents and infusing this study with YA titles that offer contemporary takes on age-old problems encourages a deeper understanding of literature and the larger world. While some may argue that there just isn’t room for YA titles given the already full curriculum, such an inclusion actually creates a gateway to richer discussions of common themes in literature.

The Lesson in These Lessons

In recent years, there has been growing interest in supporting, guiding, and orienting beginning educators as they transition into their first teaching positions. Such supports have been touted as potential means through which to increase teacher retention rates through the provision of a network upon which those new to the profession can draw as they maneuver their way through their first days in the classroom (Cochran-Smith, M., 2004; Kelley, L.M., 2004; Smith, T., & Ingersoll, R., 2003; Ingersoll, R.M., & Smith, T.M., 2004). These networks, however, have typically

been conceived and grounded in school settings where, it has been argued, the immediate school climate and opportunities for connection and collaboration serve as determinants of whether or not teachers remain in the profession (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004). The in-school mentoring structure, in and of itself, fails to guarantee sufficient professional interaction and collective responsibility among teachers across experience levels, both of which new teachers need to thrive (Kardos 2004, 2001). Indeed, even when teachers report their involvement in a mentoring program in their school, effective assistance does not necessarily follow (Ingersoll, 2000). Each of the new teachers described in this paper participated (with mixed success) in a school mentoring program designed to provide support from experienced English language arts teachers at the school site. This institutionalized mentor support system was designed to provide guidance as these first-year teachers wrestled for the first time with the realities of limited resources, interactions with parents and administrators, and decisions about curriculum and instruction. However, these teachers reported limits to this mentor system, identifying specific areas of deficit ranging from minor concerns about curriculum mapping to more major concerns about how to work with colleagues, including the mentor teachers themselves, who often offered inappropriate and unhelpful critique under the guise of support.

Significantly, each of these first-year teachers also made an explicit decision to engage in the professional community beyond the walls of the school, preparing for and presenting at conferences, including a national conference, and writing this piece, thus providing additional layers of induction extending from the local community into the larger professional community.

When these new educators were asked, “What have attending conferences and collaborating on writing projects such as this done for you as a first year teacher? Why were you willing to engage in such tasks? What did you gain from them?,” they first noted the ways in which these out-of-school professional activities created opportunities for professional growth, arguing, “It’s really important to keep exposing myself to new, innovative teaching methods that various people all over the country are using,” and

“The collaboration and resources available at these conferences make me shiver with excitement. I know there will never be a day that I would go to these conferences and come back empty handed. It is all about wanting to spark the interests of all of my kids and be a better teacher.” Secondly, they identified the ways in which these activities provided a validation of their teaching philosophy and related practices, noting, “As a first year teacher, I continually draw upon my professional development experiences as a source of inspiration and as a means to redefine and remind me of my purpose as an educator,” and “The conferences show me that I am not alone in the world with my teaching style.” Additionally, they expressed gratitude for the opportunity to interact and collaborate with those who share their passion for literature, teaching, and kids, saying,

It is all about wanting to spark the interests of all of my kids and be a better teacher.”

“There is something to be said for simply sitting around with a bunch of other professionals who all have the same goal (to give students the best and most meaningful experiences possible) and talk about what everyone is doing in his/her classrooms. It is so easy to get so caught up in the day to day grind of your own classroom, especially as a first year teacher, that it’s important to take a step back once in a while and reflect on what you’re doing, while sharing your experiences with others,” and “Working on collaborative projects offers a chance to celebrate the literature I love with others who share my passion and so renews my passion. I can bring that back to my students and share it with them.” Finally, engaging in out-of-school professional induction provided these first-year teachers an intellectual challenge, encouraging them to critically reflect upon their work in the classroom, as revealed by these comments: “Participating in conferences and collaborating on articles, such as this, have pushed me in my thinking about educational philosophies and strategies;” “This paper has made me critically evaluate what I have done this year and, in an educated way, back up what I am doing and explain why it is meaningful;” and “Having to continuously reflect on my own writing, my own mission, exploring texts that I might not under other circum-

stances, forcing me to feel uncomfortable by revealing my first year practice—these experiences shape me, making me a stronger, more dimensional teacher.”

Conclusions

These beginning teachers assumed the identity of professional educators, leaders in the school community who possess professional knowledge and skills, behave as reflective practitioners capable of using inquiry to elicit change, and believe that enabling children to become successful citizens in a democracy is a moral imperative. Each of these teachers willingly approached her respective department head, for example, and found a receptive audience willing to provide requisite funds or permissions to enact changes to the existing curricula. These first-year teachers possessed both the expertise and confidence

necessary to bridge the power differential inherent in a faculty member-department head relationship.

Yet, their reach has extended beyond the four walls of the school building. They recognize that it is their professional duty to engage in the larger conversation around schooling, to remain abreast of best practices and materials that might support those practices, and to actively live as scholar-teachers willing to reflect upon, write about, and share their own professional growth and development with their colleagues working in diverse settings. Beginning teachers who work with same-subject mentors and engage in collective

induction experiences (including collaborative work with other teachers) are less likely to leave their schools and leave teaching than those who did not

(Smith & Ingersoll, 2003). In this case, these beginning teachers embarked on a collaborative venture that allowed them to work as peers with the support of an English education mentor. They took it upon themselves to devise, implement, reflect upon, and share in a process of authentic professional development. They have found a voice in the professional community beyond their individual school settings, suggesting the value of fostering cross-school collaborations with real audiences and the value of professional organizations that value the voices of the new, allowing them to spread their wings in a safe environment.

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Erica Berg is an English teacher at Rockville High School in Vernon, CT. Originally from Cheshire, CT, she received her Master's degree in English Education from the University of Connecticut. She is passionate about the incorporation of multicultural and young adult texts into the curriculum. In her spare time, she is writing a young adult novel.

Katie Heintz is a second-year teacher of freshman, sophomores, and juniors at Lyme-Old Lyme High School in Connecticut. She weaves contemporary young adult literature into the traditional curriculum through a department-embraced independent reading program. Beyond the classroom, she is currently working with her department to receive a grant from a local education foundation to further promote and enhance each English teacher's classroom library.

Danielle King is a second-year English teacher at East Hampton High School in East Hampton, Connecticut. She graduated with her Master's Degree in Education from the Neag School of Education at the University of Connecticut in 2007 and completed Honors research related to eighth-grade reading habits along gender lines.

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Fundamental Middle School in St. Petersburg, FL. Her middle school students truly enjoy the YA literature that she brings into the classroom. They can often be found swapping books and debating favorite characters. Jill's goal is to draw on her students as inspiration for her own YA novel that will someday provide fodder for more meaningful discussions in the classroom.

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