



**The
Teachers' Loft**

P.O. Box 131, Easthampton MA 01027
(413) 221-0111 • www.teachersloft.org

October 1, 2006

Dear Prospect Friends,

It is my pleasure and honor to offer an introduction to the work of four teachers from The Teachers' Loft. The opportunity for us to contribute to the Review and the documentation of our teaching work, voice and knowledge has been a long-term desire.

Tawnya, Robin, Helena and Kate are members of The Teachers' Voices: A Multi-Year Collaborative group at The Teachers' Loft in Western Massachusetts. Tawnya, a member of the original First-Year Teachers' Collaborative in 2003, has coordinated this group since 2004, supported by Kate and Robin, two other colleagues from that same original collaborative group. At the beginning of last year (their ominous third and fifth years of teaching, when 30 and 50 percent of teachers leave teaching, respectively) the Teachers' Voices group set a goal to publish their stories about their beginning teaching experience. Today you are reading the results of their effort

-- a wish pursued and made a reality. Without question the voices of these teachers who have chosen to continue teaching offer perspectives we need to heed in order to understand and enact what supports dedicated teachers staying (rather than narrowly focusing efforts on those who are leaving and why they have left).

As people like you who work in schools know, the individuals who start teaching come from all kinds of life experience and versions of teacher preparation. What constitutes help for rising to the daily intensity of teaching and support for how to sustain oneself over the weeks, months and years of practice is particular to the individual. Yet we also know from experience as well as the research literature that the initial one to three years in the field bring with them some very particular professional development needs. Whether you're 45 years old or 22 when you embark on your first year, there are still some "usual suspects" you have to work through and make sense of, and though many of us will pass over common thresholds we each do so with utter uniqueness. Of

course no one knows this better than those of us who have engaged with the Prospect Descriptive Processes, especially in the context of an ongoing study group or inquiry project.

The Teachers' Voices: A Multi-Year Collaborative is built on the same tenets as each of The Teachers' Loft collaborative groups. As part of developing the Next Educational Wave (Teachers' Loft, 2006; learn more at <http://www.teachersloft.org/get-involved/new-teachers-leaders.htm>) of teachers and teacher leaders, The Teachers' Loft works with small groups of teachers, over the entire school year, to meet the needs of their particular context. This is in fulfillment of our mission, "to alter the status quo of teacher isolation by inviting teachers to take part in local, collaborative, professional development." Like other meaningful professional development, the flexibility to meet the particular teaching/learning needs of beginning teachers then continues to develop as a reflexive capacity across the teaching career and personal learning continuum.

The Teachers' Loft is a non-profit organization co-founded in 2003

by my colleague Jenn Cook and me. As former pre K -12 teachers, both of us shared a common interest in addressing the staggering challenges facing beginning teachers. At the time, in most public schools new teacher support was equivalent to maybe-you-will-get-a-mentor. We envisioned something more comprehensive to meet the needs of teachers and sought to create a "third space" providing a unique educational resource where pre K-12 teachers can take part in community-based professional development of a high quality. We admired Prospect's part in developing teacher research and teacher knowledge over the past four decades. We sought to build on that legacy. Now in our fourth year, The Teachers' Loft is pleased to continue providing a space for teachers to pursue growth as professionals, as learners, as collaborators, and as leaders.

I wish each of you a wonderful new school year, rich with shared humanity that provides each of us the strength and renewal to continue in our loved work.

Yours truly,

Paige M. Bray



Executive Director
The Teachers' Loft
www.teachersloft.org
413.221.0111