

Education Summit of the Vermont State Legislature  
University of Vermont, Davis Center  
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Jean Berthiaume, Principal, Fayston Elementary School

My name is Jean Berthiaume and I am a 2009 Rowland Fellow and now serve the Rowland Foundation as Senior Associate. As a classroom teacher, I believe I was teaching in innovative ways and developing progressive curriculum for my students. At the core of my teaching is the cultivation of student responsibility for learning. The Rowland Foundation has provided me with the opportunity to better understand the value and role of student voice and responsibility in learning. My sabbatical experience gave me permission to get lost and confused in the pursuit of my own research for how to cultivate student responsibility in our schools. This permission to get lost and confused was an essential part of my learning as a fellow and what I find most absent in schools today.

I'm here today to share with you my perspective on education as both a teacher and a new principal of a small elementary school in Fayston. I'm concerned our culture of assessment is one time and high stakes. As an elementary school principal, I am more appreciative of the foundations of learning and the progressions of learning that can be measured throughout a school year.

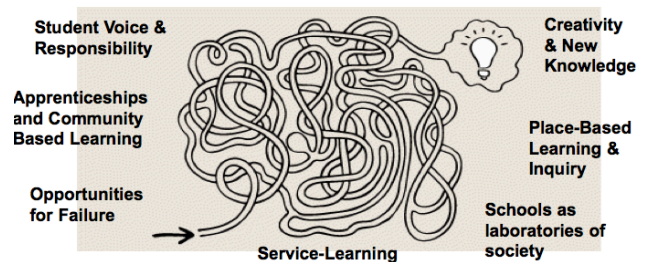
As a high school social studies teacher I was developed curriculum that engaged learners with opportunities to use the context of community for applied learning. It challenged me as a teacher to be more of a facilitator of learning experiences, and finally the systems of secondary education. The system challenges lead me to be a teacher leader in my school and now an administrator.

There are a couple of examples of my curriculum that I would like to share with you that will go well with the illustration being projected behind me.

The first example is a course developed for 10<sup>th</sup> graders called *Creating Sustainable Communities (CSC)*. CSC is a non-traditional civics course that used the context of community for applied civics learning. The course engaged students with big questions that regarded their community and what is worth sustaining. Students considered

these questions with no correct answers in terms of the environment, economy, and social justice. For example, when considering the be question about sustainable energy use in our community students partnered with Efficiency Vermont, energy audit businesses, the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission, the school,

**Perspective:  
Teacher Leader & New Principal**



and their parents. Students in the end of this unit developed a presentation and convinced the school board and greater community to support a \$30,000 capital project to retrofit the school in terms of lighting. They were able to demonstrate to the board and community the sustainability rationale for doing this project and the pay back period to the school and community for making these changes in lighting.

Another course that I taught was called *Co-Motion*. This course was offered to juniors and seniors. It provided students with an opportunity to select and identify a community problem that concerned them. Students researched the problem by interviewing various community members. They also investigated what had been done to date, and what other communities had done with similar problems, challenges, or projects. This work and learning was not dissimilar to what you all do as state legislators!

As a principal, I felt like I would be better positioned to make the changes necessary to modernize the education experience. Unfortunately, I'm challenged in the following ways:

1. **Education Funding Formula & Year to Year Budgeting:** Visioning and transformation work is difficult in light of our current education funding formula. When I'm faced with budgeting each year and unclear about staffing levels or programs it challenges us to work towards a vision. My dream would be to have a 3-5 year budget!
2. **Mandates:** More and more unfunded mandates create challenges for us as we are not given more time or funds to meet these mandates. I have fewer and fewer days to be an education leader in the school. My focus is more of a manager.
3. **School Day & Year:** It is time for us to consider a more flexible schedule and school year. This is necessary for the retention of learning and for new and authentic learning opportunities within and outside of our schools.

Thank you very for letting us share with you our collective wisdom on best practices and how best to support them here in Vermont.

Sincerely,

Jean Berthiaume

2009 Rowland Fellow & Senior Associate for the Rowland Foundation