Learning to Lead

By Doris Ray and Ann Pike

Subject: Professional development, leadership

Standards: *NETS•T* I, II; *NETS•A* II
(http://www.iste.org/standards/)

A Maine staff development program empowers teachers to become leaders.

On the surface, learning and leading may appear to be opposites. Learners are commonly thought to be naïve and innocent. Leaders are expected to possess special skills and knowledge. However, these apparent opposites may be like two sides of the same coin, a dynamic combination that generates powerful results. A Maine nonprofit has created a program that allows teachers to be both learners and leaders.

The Technology Learning Leaders (TLL) program is part of Spreading Educator to Educator Developments (SEED). Jenifer Van Deusen, SEED's director since 1993, is an ardent promoter of teacher-to-teacher professional development. She believes that there are many skilled and talented teachers who are untapped resources. Unfortunately, few structures exist for teacher-to-teacher capacity building. Most of Maine's small, rural schools lack the resources to create in-house positions for teacher-leaders. In 1999, Van Deusen introduced the TLL model as a statewide "greenhouse" project to grow teacher leaders.

TLL participants are practicing educators taking part in an exciting teacher leadership program that gives them opportunities to learn, lead, and serve education in ways that are typically beyond a teacher's reach. This five-year-old initiative invites Maine's teachers to be leaders and offers them high-quality professional learning opportunities. TLL participants also feature prominently in the Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI). The TLL program is part of a suite of teacher support offered in Maine in support of the MLTI. (*Editor's note:* See "The Power of One-to-One," pp. 6–11, for more on the MLTI.)

The current cohort of 41 TLL participants embodies Maine's educational diversity. One is a technology coordinator in King Middle School, an ethnically rich inner-city school in Portland whose seventh and eighth graders represent more than 30 different nationalities. Another is a former commercial artist from New York who teaches social studies and graphic arts to high school students at the Rangeley Community School, a rural K–12 school with about 250 students. They also vary in their years in education, with anywhere from 2 to 29 years of teaching experience—13.5 years is the mean. Forty-seven percent work in middle schools, 27% in high schools, and 22% in elementary schools. A few serve in district-level positions, such as technology coordinators or integrators.

The TLL Experience

TLL participants are educators who are skilled in technology integration and interested in providing learning experiences for adults. They are selected through a competitive application process. SEED offers a two-day TLL Training Institute, where the teachers begin forming relationships with one another as they learn about SEED's framework for high-quality teaching and learning with technology. They add to their technology integration knowledge and acquire skills for designing and delivering effective presentations for adult learners.

TLL participants are regularly engaged as leaders in planning, decision making, and evaluation of professional development activities at both regional and state levels. Together with SEED Regional Coordinators, they plan programs and events around the SEED goals and outcomes and regional needs and priorities. They determine the nature, format and scheduling of these offerings. Then, they work collaboratively to design and deliver the services. TLL participants also serve as presenters and facilitators for SEED's many statewide events and programs. SEED regional coordinators are organizers, coaches, cheerleaders, and team builders. They offer participants guidance, support, and many opportunities for professional development. They ensure that TLL teams are purposeful, productive, and effective. They also champion their region's unique culture and needs and work with the teams to craft appropriate responses.

The TLL experience reduces the isolation teachers often feel because

> The TLL experience reduces the isolation teachers often feel because it supports and nurtures professional relationships.

it supports and nurtures professional relationships. "I'm with other teachers who have worked similarly with technology. To be taken from my isolated environment, then placed with people who are really excited has really changed things for me," says one veteran. The regional meetings maintain and enhance the relationships among the TLL participants. "We listen to each other," another reports. "We might not always agree, but we listen and we're open to one another's ideas. This system lets you talk at a professional level and gives you that time to do it." Rarely, it seems, do classroom teachers have this kind of sustained opportunity to work closely with other like-minded professionals.

TLL participants have ready access to one another as sources of both technical competence and teaching expertise. They supplement the regional meetings with regular telephone conversations and e-mail exchanges. One participant says that she relies on this communication: "There are three people in my region that I keep in pretty close contact with, usually over e-mail. We talk about conferences we'd like to attend and good lessons we've been doing lately, units, resources, things of that nature."

MLTI's Leverage
The TLL program's growth was powerfully leveraged by involvement in MLTI. Through a partnership with Apple, TLL participants provided the technical teacher training component of MLTI. By fall 2003, more than 1,500 of Maine's seventh and eighth

grade teachers had completed the training. In addition, SEED's regional workshops (many of which are delivered by TLL participants) are offered at no cost to all Maine seventh and eighth grade teachers.

Apple senior project specialist Doug Snow appreciates and values the TLL participants' contribution to MLTI: "They enabled us to establish immediate collegial relations with teachers involved in the project. The TLL [participants] exemplified what we hope many of their colleagues will demonstrate over the coming years in terms of improving teaching and learning through the infusion of technology. They were also able to interact with and relate to teachers attending sessions at a deeper level."

Clearly, MLTI was a highly visible, public arena to showcase the capacity of SEED's TLL model. It provided on-the-job professional development as well as an opportunity for participants to lead groundbreaking work. MLTI was an ideal practice field for teachers to be professional developers. It was a tailor-made forum for using their knowledge, talents, and skills and for leveraging the power of teacher-to-teacher professional development. Furthermore, the TLL participants benefited personally and professionally.

Benefits for Participants
As part of our evaluation of the effects of this progam on participants, we found that the TLL participants are serving education in ways that were never before possible. "You don't

normally get asked to lead and serve other educators," says a participant who teaches language arts at Mountain Valley High School in Rumford. "And, you don't get recognized for doing those types of things. As a TLL you are trusted with that responsibility. That is really telling us that SEED has confidence in us. Therefore, we have confidence in ourselves." They see that their work is affecting their school districts, regions, and state.

TLL participants are adding value to their own schools and school districts by supporting their local colleagues. "When teachers have one of us on-site, they have someone that supports them constantly as they work through a project that involves technology," says one participant. "This on-site support often stimulates teachers to apply for some of the SEED awards, and, it personalizes the process."

They contribute to the design, delivery, and assessment of regional services. These services help Maine educators use technology to support high-quality standards-based teaching. They ensure that these services are practical and meaningful for teachers and that they are continuously improved.

The TLL program also provides services beyond participants' regions. Because Maine's remote northernmost and easternmost counties are sparsely populated and have fewer participants, teacher leaders from other regions are sometimes mobilized to deliver services in those areas. TLL participants also make presentations at state and regional conferences and events.

Since becoming involved in the program, many TLL participants report that they have been offered more leadership positions within their schools or districts. They are more likely to serve on committees that make technology decisions, to take new positions and roles in their school or district, to be perceived as resources by their peers, and to apply for and receive grants and awards.

Observable and Measurable Results

We believe that one of the TLL model's greatest strengths is that it uses practicing educators as professional developers. As one TLL puts it, "TLL participants are out there, and they know what it's like in the real world with day-to-day teaching." Other TLL participants agree. "We're teachers first. We speak teachers' language on their level, and they respect us as teachers. I think that's really what's so special about this." Teachers attending regional workshops have a good reaction to the TLL participants. One said, "The TLLs are such positive educators and are willing to give me immediate response to my questions." Another said, "They were wonderful and refreshing to work with! I hope their school districts know what talent they have."

Our belief is increasingly supported by educational research. Teachers are emerging as an important source of staff development expertise. In

One study indicates that teachers involved as staff developers embrace standards-based teaching practices more readily.

LOOK FOR THIS SEAL

National Educational Technology Standards

iste
nets aligned
for Students
for Teachers
for Administrators

It's your assurance that a product or service has demonstrated alignment with ISTE's National Educational Technology Standards (NETS). You'll find this Seal of Alignment on products, services, and resources ISTE has rigorously reviewed and determined meet specific NETS standards for Students (NETS•S), Teachers (NETS•T), and/or Administrators (NETS•A).

To date, more than 90% of states already use NETS in their technology, assessment, and/or curriculum plans.

Visit www.iste.org/standards/ to learn more.

Look for the ISTE NETS Review and Seal of Alignment when evaluating your Ed Tech purchases.

Making Our Own Road: The Emergence of School-Based Staff Developers In America's Public Schools, Alan Richard asserts that this approach constitutes a new kind of staff development. He identifies a number of hopeful signs that this approach promises to deliver job-embedded professional development and new leadership opportunities. Our experience with the TLL model confirms Richard's assertions. (***Editor's note:*** Find a link to this report and other resources on p. 17.)

He says that teachers involved in leadership programs such as this one develop a new culture of reflection. Many TLL participants report that the most significant and powerful of SEED's professional development strategies is that of fostering reflective practice. They offer examples of times when, either individually or collectively, they are asked to review the work they have done with a critical eye. This happens in regard to workshops they conduct for adults and to instructional units they create. One TLL describes the importance of reflection. "I think really looking at our teaching practices, analyzing things, having conversations about the stuff that really matters in teaching is probably what teachers have craved the most. That doesn't happen so much in faculty meetings in schools. I think this has made the biggest difference for us."

Richard's study indicates that teachers involved as staff developers embrace standards-based teaching practices more readily. SEED's evaluation of the first two-year TLL cycle showed that TLL participants increased their understanding of content standards and began to use them more intentionally in their teaching practice as a result of their experience. TLL participants report that they are now much more discriminating about standards-based curriculum, instruction, and assessment. They

> TLL participants are changing and extending the nature of their work as teachers. They say that the experience has opened up unforeseen choices, unprecedented opportunities, and intriguing doors into leadership venues that were not previously available to them.

say that this new level of awareness is a direct result of their TLL experience. "SEED's process of assessing things and evaluation … makes you think.… How do we know that we're actually seeing valid evidence of learning? How are we looking for this evidence? I take these ideas back to my classroom and my students."

TLL participants are changing and extending the nature of their work as teachers. They say that the experience has opened up unforeseen choices, unprecedented opportunities, and intriguing doors into leadership venues

that were not previously available to them. Many are going on to further their formal education or are considering new roles in education. TLL participants are also being recognized individually for their accomplishments. The current cohort includes three National Semiconductor Internet Innovator Award winners, a Maine Public Broadcasting Teacher of the Year, an Apple Distinguished Educator, a Maine Technology Teacher of the Year, and a host of expert trainers for programs such as Marco Polo, NTTI Public Broadcasting, and Smartboard.

Finally, we are collecting student achievement data for SEED participants. This data will be available in May 2005.

Conclusion

According to our evaluation of the program, the TLL model is yielding exciting results and benefits:

- Reducing teacher isolation.
- Encouraging teachers to make changes in their teaching, in their roles in schools, and to take on leadership functions and challenges.
- Building teachers' confidence by acknowledging and highlighting their strengths, talents, and contributions to teaching and learning.
- Nourishing and promoting leadership by engaging teachers in planning, decision making, and evaluation.
- Increasing knowledge and skills in a variety of areas by offering and making available a powerful constellation of professional development activities.
- Improving teachers' capacity for integrating technology thoughtfully and purposefully.

We believe that SEED's TLL program responds directly to three critical needs. First, it counteracts the isolation of teaching. Particularly in rural areas, teachers find themselves alone and lonely with few opportunities to collaborate with other educators in meaningful ways. Second, it offers a promising solution to the problem of how to help teachers and schools maximize technology's potential. In Maine, it is ensuring that schools get the returns they want from their substantial technology investments. Finally, it is a viable and resourceful structure for rural areas with small, geographically and economically challenged schools. It brings the capacities, skills, and social capital of regional organizations and high-quality teachers to schools that need them the most.

SEED's TLL model leverages the power of leading as learning. The physicist Niels Bohr once wrote, "The opposite of a fact is a falsehood, but the opposite of one profound truth may very well be another profound truth." We believe this approach incorporates two profound truths, the synergistic experiences of learning and leading. The dynamic, creative tension between these experiences produces instructional leaders that schools desperately need.

Resources

Richard, A. (2003). *"Making our own road": The emergence of school based staff developers in America's public schools.* New York: Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. Available: http://www.emcf.org/pdf/student_ourownroad.pdf.

SEED: http://www.mainecenter.org/seed/

Doris Ray is one of the program evaluators for SEED. She is a Maine-based independent consultant who specializes in action research and evaluation and works primarily with schools in rural states.

Ann Pike is a SEED regional coordinator for western Maine and is assistant director of the Western Maine Partnership, one of SEED's regional partner organizations.