Jessica Rosenthal, Capstone Project

*Utilizing Technology in the Classroom by Employing a Blended Learning Model, with Reflections of a Teacher Leadership Initiative Member*

**Leadership Profile**

My experiences as a **leader** so far have been to:

* Serve on the Achievement In Math (AIM) Team in my school building.
* Serve as the union representative in my building.
* Serve as a crisis team representative for my building when our union was without a contact.
* Serve as a delegate at the Massachusetts Teachers Association’s (MTA) Annual Meeting held in May.
* Serve as a member on the MTA’s New Member Committee. Responsibilities on this committee include:
  + Attending monthly planning meetings
  + Organizing, planning, and presenting workshops at the annual Just For New Teachers Conference held in December.
  + Organizing, planning, and presenting the weeklong New Member Program at the MTA Annual Summer Conference, held every August.

**Context**: I am currently a second grade teacher in Stoughton, Massachusetts. I have taught second grade for six years, and have also taught fourth grade for a total of two years. I am dual-licensed in Early Childhood and Elementary Education, and am certified to teach grades Pre-K-6.

**Description of pathway and competencies:**

The pathway I chose was *Instructional Leadership*.

The reason I chose this pathway was because I already felt that my association leadership was pretty strong due to my involvement at the local and state level. While I suppose I could have gravitated towards policy leadership, I felt that putting my efforts toward instructional leadership would be most beneficial for my students. By collaborating with other teachers in my district or state on curriculum development, we could take steps we needed in order to have our students experience continued success.

My Project was based on two passions I discovered I had as I made my way through TLI. The first concerned utilizing technology in a meaningful way. This was due to the fact that while we are lucky in my district to have access to quite a bit of technology, we are not often trained on these technologies fully to utilize their educational potential. While most of the staff in my district are confident in utilizing the Smartboards in their classrooms, I was finding not many people in my district were as comfortable utilizing the iPad carts, laptop carts, or document cameras. I thought that if perhaps we could find meaningful uses for these items, it would no longer appear that the technology was simply “thrown” at us.

Secondly, I greatly enjoyed studying under the school redesign model during the summer portion of TLI, and became very interested in blended learning and the idea of a flipped classroom model. I was determined to somehow incorporate this into my teaching. I thought that if I could perhaps be successful using this model in my own classroom, then I could present the model to other members in my building, district, and possibly even state.

Its intended goals were:

* To identify specific technology/programs that could benefit student learning.
* To practice a blended learning/flipped classroom/school redesign model during our math block.

The 4 **competencies** I have selected for focus on my project are:

1. Coaching and Mentoring
2. Facilitating Collaborative Relationships
3. Personal Effectiveness
4. Technological Facility

The reasons were:

1. As a ***coach/mentor***, I noticed that I felt confident when it came to educating others about our local and state association, but felt I could improve my overall knowledge of using curriculum effectively. I thought I could improve in this area by collaborating with colleagues, doing my own research, and eventually discussing my thoughts with others.

In the beginning when I first joined TLI, I saw myself as **emerging**, or possibly even lower than that. Last year was a difficult one for many reasons, and many factors led me to feel that my knowledge of curriculum and ability to utilize curriculum effectively were not up to par. My self-confidence was low and I felt that I was doing my students a disservice. However, after a lot of reflecting on my practice (I know, another competency!) I now see myself as straddling **developing** and **performing**. Not only have I had opportunities to discuss ways to improve my own practice with colleagues, I have also had opportunities to share my insights as well. The most recent example of this is when I was a presenter at the Just For New Teachers Conference. While presenting a workshop on Differentiated Instruction, I referenced how I had changed my math block and was attempting to utilize a blended learning model. After the workshop, one of the participants expressed great interest in what I had done and asked for suggestions, since she was trying to implement something similar in her district. After a lengthy conversation, I ended up emailing her the outline of my model, of which she enthusiastically received and stated she was excited to begin trying it out. I was glad that the model I had asked for peer feedback on could now be beneficial to someone I was “mentoring” for the day.

1. As a ***facilitator of collaborative relationships***, I definitely saw myself as **emerging** in this area last year. Due to difficulty with contract negotiations, our members had purposely not volunteered for committees that we usually joined. For me, this meant I would no longer be part of my school’s Achievement in Math (AIM) Team. Normally, this team provides me with a wonderful opportunity to collaborate with colleagues about our math curriculum. We discuss and analyze data, implement extra curricular activities for our students, and provide feedback to math curriculum supervisors. By standing with the union and choosing to not be on this committee, I missed a lot. (Though I do still agree that it was the right choice at the time!) When we were told to go back and join these committees, I found that I was hesitant to speak up, was not as vocal as I usually was, and watched the clock so I could leave right when contractual time ended. Even though I was back on the team, I wasn’t utilizing it for my own benefit. Since then, I would now identify myself as **performing** in this area. Recently, our district developed benchmark tests for all the elementary students to take in math. At the last AIM meeting, I made sure to bring my tests, tell the team how my students had performed, and was very vocal in mentioning that some of the questions needed to be altered due to the order we were teaching certain topics. My suggestions were heard and taken seriously, and gave other people on the team chances to agree that they were noticing similar issues in other grades.
2. In the area of ***personal effectiveness***, I first saw myself as **emerging**. Through my work with TLI, I was thrilled to understand exactly what some of my passions were, and how to continue to develop those passions through teacher leadership opportunities. Thanks to TLI, I now see myself straddling **performing and transforming** in this area. Since TLI, I have joined a new project with two teachers from Massachusetts and three teachers from Colorado, titled “Ford’s More and Better Learning Time”. By exploring this new area of teacher leadership, I am excited to use my passions to help facilitate other teachers in meaningful conversations to create a product in MBLT.
3. As a ***technological facilitator***, I believed I was **emerging** in this area when I first began TLI. I felt confident in using the basic technology provided to me in my classroom, but never gave it too much thought on how to utilize this technology to its maximum potential for my students. Currently, I would say I am still **developing** in this area. While it was the one of the goals of my capstone project to utilize technology meaningfully, I am still finding it challenging at this point due to the ever-changing technology. While I have in particular tried to keep up with online resources/iPad apps for the classroom, I at times find it difficult to keep up! I think this is an area I will always be striving to improve on for many years to come. I am also hoping to look into some technology courses to increase my performance in this area.

**Including your rationale for choosing to address this challenge and its connections to the Teacher Leadership Initiative Competencies and the pathways of leadership selected.**

* + *What prompted you to select this particular leadership pathway for your project?*

I chose the ***instructional leadership*** pathway because I felt as though my leadership skills needed to get back to the classroom itself. I became a teacher to help my students be the best they could be, and my motto has always been “it’s all about the kids”. I wanted to make sure I focused particularly on the instructional aspect, because I feel as though that is an area that is starting to fall to the wayside in favor of all the standardized testing. There is a lot of focus on teaching to the test rather than focusing on the best instruction for our students learning needs, and we need to go back and examine what’s really the most important.

* + *How does focusing on the selected competencies enable you to address your identified challenge?*

I believe these competencies enable me to address this challenge because again, I feel as though they are helping me get back to the instructional “basics”. These competencies challenge me to reflect on my own personal effectiveness as a teacher, reach out and collaborate with teachers I can learn and improve my teaching from, as well as encourage others to reflect and improve on their own teaching. By attempting to stay up to date with technology, I am also doing my students a favor by familiarizing myself with tools they may need to be successful in the future.

* + *How does your project address the Capstone expectations?*

I believe the whole TLI experience encouraged me to examine where I was as a teacher leader, identify areas of improvement, and *improve* on them! By identifying an action plan early, I began to realize what small steps I could make to begin to improve myself as a teacher leader. By getting a chance to pick a specific content strand of interest (school redesign), I was able to discover what interested me and how I was going to utilize these interests in the classroom while still trying to incorporate aspects of my action plan. While I am sure this is not always going to be the case, I thought it rather interesting to find ways to blend the two ideas.

**Plan and implementation – steps taken to implement your project, including those that may not be completed by the conclusion of TLI:**

Over the summer, I redesigned my entire approach to teaching mathematics to my students. I decided to use the approach of creating math centers rather than the use of traditional instruction to practice format that I had been doing in the past. Keeping blended learning and the use of technology in mind, I planned to embrace a flipped classroom model. A detailed explanation of my project is as follows:

Math Lesson Format with Math Centers

Activator: Review previous day's lesson, state today's objective (2-3 minutes).

Introduce/discuss and new vocabulary (5 minutes).

Watch the "video" on the Smartboard that corresponds to the day's lesson\* (5-10 minutes).

\*If possible, practice a flipped classroom model by having the students complete this part at home for homework in preparation for the day's lesson. That way students can view the lesson at their own speed, stop, reflect, and go forward or backward as needed.

Math Centers (45-60 minutes).

Students are divided into three homogeneous groups according to math ability, with a below level, on level, and above level group. These groups will originally be determined using AIMsweb data and teacher observations. While homogenous, the groups will remain flexible and adjustable throughout the school year. Moving students between groups will continue to be determined using AIMSweb data and teacher observation, as well as formative assessments, summative assessments, and biweekly practice on Xtramath.org. Each group will rotate through the same centers daily: meeting with the teacher, independent work, and math activities.

The order for each group is as follows:

Below-Level Group:

1. Meet with Teacher
2. Independent Work
3. Math Activities\*\*

On-Level Group:

1. Independent Work
2. Math Activites\*\*
3. Meet With Teacher

Above-Level Group:

1. Math Activities\*\*
2. Meet with Teacher
3. Independent Work

\*\*On the day or days that there is a second teacher available, math activities will be replaced with another teacher-led center where the students will practice solving word problems using the QFPS strategy.

Responsibilities of the Students at Each Center:

1. Meeting with the Teacher:
   1. The below-level group will be responsible for starting the math packet that corresponds with the day's lesson, asking the teacher for assistance as needed. If necessary, the teacher will stop the group and provide more direct instruction as needed, or begin the group this way before the students begin the packet.
   2. The on-level group will be responsible for bringing the math packet that they have been working on at the independent center to the group. It is expected that these students have completed their math work and checked and fixed any incorrect problems with the provided answer key. They will discuss with the teacher what problems were missed/confusing and a review will be conducted. If time allows, an enrichment sheet will be assigned and completed with teacher assistance.
   3. The above-level group will be responsible for completing enrichment activities with the teacher. Examples of enrichment activities include more difficult worksheet practice and iPad work.

2. Independent Work

* 1. During this time, students must first complete the math packet that corresponds with the day's lesson. When it is completed, the students will consult the answer key to check and correct their work. If they have answered any of the problems incorrectly, they must go back and fix it. In addition, they must also be able to tell a teacher or peer what exactly they did incorrectly.
  2. Next, the students will complete the "Problem of the Day" which will be posted on the Smartboard in the front of the classroom. These will be completed in the students' math notebooks. Since the Problem of the Day will be reviewed at the end of class, it is ok if the student does not finish it in the allotted time. Once students become more comfortable and independent with QFPS practice, it will be expected that the students complete the Problem of the Day using this format.
  3. If time permits, students may work on their math vocabulary sheets that correspond with the current math topic. The students will have the length of the math topic to complete this assignment, and will have the opportunity to practice their vocabulary during math activity time. This assignment can also be completed during quiet time.
  4. If time allows, students may choose an independent math assignment to complete from the assignment bin. These assignments vary in task and difficulty and directly correspond to the objectives of the math topic.

3. Math Activities

During this time students will be responsible for getting with a partner and practicing math vocabulary or a math skill relating to the current math topic. Math activities can be found in the activity bin, with each bag or folder containing all the materials the students need. Math activities can include vocabulary flash card practice, quizzing on math facts, or a math game that relates directly to the objectives of the math topic. In addition, students may also choose a teacher selected iPad app to play during this time. This option will be available when it is possible to sign up for the iPad cart during math time.

Summarizer: At the conclusion of math centers, students will return to their seats to review the Problem of the Day that was completed during Independent Work. (5 minutes).

* **Evidence of success/effectiveness –** 
  + *What evidence indicates that your project was successful?*

I believe my project was successful because this math format is now followed and completed by my students daily 4 times a week. In addition, my students visit the computer lab twice a week to independently complete the Xtramath.org program, which tests the students on their addition and subtraction facts. I enjoy utilizing this program because it can adjust itself to go at each student’s individual pace in order for him/her to obtain mastery. It is also provides the students with extra technology practice, as they are expected to turn the computer on, bring up the internet to the correct web page, and sign in independently to the program. Some evidence I have that this project is successful is through the positive feedback I received from my principal at a recent observation, as well as receiving a request from another teacher to come and observe the math center format. Both of these things, along with monitoring student progress, make me confident that this model will continue to be successful.

* + *What work do you still need to do to make it completely successful?*

As happy as I have been with the progress in my project so far, I have definitely run into some challenges. Unfortunately, I was not able to implement the flipped classroom model because I discovered that not all of my students had internet access at home. This was a definite hurdle that I am still brainstorming ideas to try and get around. While I am open to the idea of students coming before or after school to view the math “video”, transportation can also be an issue for these students. If it does not work out this year, I am hoping it could be successful next year.

In addition, I have also found it challenging to utilize iPads in the classroom as much as I was hoping to. Currently, our school has one iPad cart that contains a class set of iPads. This cart is currently located in a fifth grade classroom. While we do have a policy in place to sign up for iPad use, I find that most of my colleagues would like to utilize the iPads frequently, and it would seem selfish if I attempted to utilize the iPad cart an hour a day for 4 days a week. I am currently brainstorming ways to possibly get 4-6 iPads to use instead of the entire cart, and possibly creating that as a fourth type of center. There is also talk of getting two more iPad carts, but I have not heard any forward developments with that as of yet. While these issues have seemed difficult at times, I am still trying to find ways to continue to make this project successful.

**Reflections on leadership growth**: A lot has changed since I first submitted my TLI application! Before joining TLI, I was proud to say I was an active member in my union at both the local and state level. Because of these activities, I would have probably defined myself as a **performing** leader. Since TLI allowed me to communicate with educators nationwide, and participate in Raise Your Hand Day in Denver this past July, I am now proud to say I am active on the national level as well. As I stated earlier, I have since joined a new leadership opportunity called Ford’s More and Better Learning Time (MBLT). One of the requirements for this new opportunity is to take the VOICE training to become a VCO in the Center For Teaching Quality Collaboratory. While I am excited to take on this new project, I have to admit it is a little out of my comfort zone, and I don’t think I would have considered it before TLI. However, TLI had taught me that one way to be an effective teacher leader is to get out there and lead. I believe that one way to better myself as a teacher leader is to come out of my comfort zone and see what I can learn from it. Thanks to TLI, I would now describe myself as a **transforming** leader.

* **Reflections on leadership growth:** *Use your TLI application as the starting point to reflect on your personal leadership growth through the TLI. Consider where you were at the beginning of this experience, as reflected in your application responses, and where you are now*.

As I look back on my application for TLI from a year ago, I found that there was one particular area where I believe I have grown as a leader the most. This was made clear to me when I reread how I answered question 1. Question 1 asked, “How can we promote and enhance the role of teacher-leaders in schools, districts, and in the profession to support student learning?” I remember reading this question and feeling a great deal of anxiety because I didn’t believe I could generate a sufficient answer (and possibly not get accepted into TLI as a result!) My answer to this question stated, “While I am unsure of how to promote this, I do know that teachers as leaders are extremely important in supporting student learning. When teachers are allowed the opportunity to educate other teachers, we are helping our students succeed because we are the ones who know our students best.” Basically, this was my professional way of saying “I don’t know!” I am happy to report that now I feel as though I *do* know. Through my participation on the New Member Committee, CTQ’s VOICE training, posting to the collaboratory, and beginning the MBLT project, I am not just finding ways to promote the role of teacher leaders, but I am actually doing it! Any steps that can be taken to get teachers to take charge and be in a leadership role at any level will definitely help to support student learning.

As I reflect on this year, I see myself as someone who has changed from **developing** to **performing**. While I would have originally thought that I was at the performing level this time last year, I believe it is the fact that I am trying new things, discovering new ways to be a teacher leader, and coming out of my comfort zone that really had me make the jump from developing to performing.

**Further Reflections (Comparing my application a year ago to where I am now):**

*1. How can we promote and enhance the role of teacher-leaders in schools, districts, and in the profession to support student learning?*

Please see above, as I discussed this question in my general reflection.

*2. Discuss your advocacy experience related to professional issues impacted by local, state, or federal policy. In what ways would you like to develop these skills, and how do you consider that to be part of your professional responsibility?*

A year ago, I wrote, “I consider the work I do at the local and state level to be a major part of my professional responsibility. At the local level, I am currently the union representative for my building, and have held that position for three years. Since my district is also currently without a contract, this year I also became a member of the crisis team. At the state level, I am part of a committee at the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA). It is called the New Member Committee, and we provide a lot of outreach to teachers in their first four years of the profession. Primarily, we do this by running a one-day conference in December, as well as a weeklong workshop at the MTA’s annual summer conference. At both of these events, I present workshops. I believe all of these roles provide me with the opportunity to keep my members educated and informed of what is happening at all levels.”

At the time, I thought this response was the strongest of the four. I am happy that I have embraced these roles as a teacher leader and continue to do so, but believe I have gone from the **performing** to **transforming** category in this area since I am now involved in ways to reach and work with teacher leaders on a national level.

3. *What do you believe the role of the union or Association should be with regard to teaching and learning issues?  How do you believe the union or Association should determine its priorities for advocacy and action?*

A year ago I wrote, “I believe the union plays an extremely strong role in regard to teaching and learning. Our working conditions are our students’ learning conditions. If our working conditions are far from ideal, what hope can we have for our students to succeed in such conditions? The union should determine its priorities for advocacy and action by recognizing the most pressing issues at the local, state, and national level, as well as stay informed with politics.”

Upon reflection, I still stand by my original answer but would like to add to it. Very often educational policy is made with little to no input from educators, and this is something that needs to change. By identifying teacher leaders and getting more people involved, *we* can become of the voice of educational policy.

While I do feel that my union involvement is strong, I believe my knowledge of policy could still be improved upon. Therefore, I believe I have gone from **emerging** to **developing** in this area.

*4. Please explain your motivation to participate in the Teacher Leadership Initiative. How do you think developing your leadership skills will impact the profession and the Association?*

A year ago I wrote, “To be honest, I hadn’t genuinely considered applying for the Teacher Leadership Initiative until I was asked to do so. Throughout much of my experience with the union, I have found that many people joined a particular cause or organization because they were asked to do so. We need to keep asking. I hope that my work in this initiative allows me to become more confident as a leader so I can start doing the asking of others to get more involved.”

I still stand by this answer. The importance of asking people to get involved should not be overlooked. The worst someone can say is no. We need to identify teacher leaders and ask them to get involved in whatever ways they feel comfortable – and sometimes uncomfortable as well! Be active in your local, state, or national association. Join TLI, keep yourself informed on educational policy, makes steps to be part of the conversation, and find your passions. This is truly what will need to be done in order for the people we care about – our students – to receive the best education possible.

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