

## **NATHAN LEWALLEN**

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### **What attracted you to the Teach Plus TLPL program?**

The opportunity to develop my facilitation skills and to network with teachers to develop action-oriented best practices that improve our practices and our students' educational outcomes.

### **What course(es) are you currently leading and/or have led through this program?**

I have led courses supporting teachers in their implementation of differentiation strategies for diverse learners using the Universal Designs for Learning framework.

### **Why did you chose this particular topic(s)? What classroom experience do you bring to it?**

I have worked in special education classrooms for 10 years. Currently, I am working in an inclusion setting. During this time, I have developed classroom structures and strategies to address the needs of a diverse group of learners.

### **What type of coaching did you receive from Teach Plus? How did this coaching help you in developing and facilitating the course?**

I worked with a skilled coach with a classroom background who modeled effective group facilitation, gave me specific and targeted feedback on lesson plans, and observed my sessions to provide me with critical and constructive feedback. Currently, I am working with a Teach Plus coach in Boston to develop my skills as a coach in my role as a peer mentor for TLPL facilitators.

### **Can you describe the facilitation experience that you led? What were the participants' reactions?**

My facilitation experiences were fairly different. In my role as a C2 facilitator, I was able to provide my participants with strategies that supported them in engaging and challenging diverse learners. In this session, my participants were especially interested in developing their use of assistive technologies. I was able to model the use of these technologies and to create resources for participants to share their interventions with each other. Participants reported that they left the course with instantly-implementable tools for their classrooms.

In my role as a TLPN facilitator, I was able to assist a small group of teachers engage in an action-based research/inquiry cycle. This was an extremely rewarding process where participants selected a problem of practice, researched and implemented interventions, and then shared these interventions with each other to borrow, adapt, and refine the most effective strategies. In the session, participants focused on developing student agency through supporting their executive functioning skills. Participants reported that this network gave them a meaningful chance to collaborate with other teachers on a high-impact intervention, that they received support and resources that helped them to create and implement these interventions, and that the interventions that they developed had a significant impact on student outcomes.

### **Did the course participants use the strategies they learned to change their practice? If so, how?**

Absolutely. We were able to create a resource bank of strategies developed and implemented by teachers (C2 UDL course) and to engage in multiple cycles of interventions of teacher-designed interventions (TLPN UDL). The implementation of strategies increased students' agency in learning, ability to set and reflect on personal goals, and access to a cognitively demanding education.

**What were some of your own learnings and takeaways from the TLPL experience?**

Teachers come to the table with a lot of knowledge and effective strategies. They really benefit from opportunities to share these with each other. Teachers are striving to create an environment that maximizes their students' performance and provides them with the best experience possible. They are open to feedback because they are trying to grow but do not receive enough from coaches, principals, and colleagues. Opportunities like TLPL are greatly valued by the teachers that participate in them.

**How does this PD differ from the PD you generally participate in through your school/district?**

The biggest difference is that it's facilitated by current teachers. At our school, we have increased the involvement of teachers in planning and delivering PD by making it a responsibility of our instructional leadership team (ILT). This has improved the actual implementation of strategies introduced at our PDs among the teachers who are modelling best practices and providing exemplars but it has not provided other teachers with an opportunity to engage in the process. Often, the teachers who are not members of the ILT would benefit the most from developing new strategies to improve student outcomes. Similarly, at large district PDs, instructors share or model strategies but do not make teachers active agents in changing their practices. To do this, teachers need support as they adapt and implement new strategies.

**What has been the effect of this work on your own classroom practice? Do you feel that you've become a better teacher by participating in Teach Plus TLPL?**

I think that working with Teach Plus' PD offerings as a participant, facilitator, and coach have all given me an opportunity to improve my teaching practices.

**How would you describe your professional growth in becoming a teacher leader to your peers?**

First, being a teacher leader requires you to lead by example which causes you to look critically at your own practices. It will challenge you to present your material to other teachers in a way that is meaningful and easy to understand. You will develop your skills in facilitation in order to best engage a variety of adult learners. Your participants will think critically about the information that you are presenting as they strive to adapt your work to their unique settings and context. As you help to guide them through this process you will continue to refine and develop the strategies that you use in your own context.

**Would you encourage other teachers to take part in Teach Plus TLPL?**

Absolutely.

**If all PD were teacher-led, what effect would it have on the profession as a whole?**

Paul Tritter, the Director of Professional Learning at Boston Teachers Union, told me that "Everyone says they want teachers at the table. But no one wants to let them order." I've thought about this statement often as I reflect on the role of teachers in a variety of contexts, including leading professional learning. We are all stakeholders in the education of our kids—teachers are not the only people "at the table."

We need parents, psychologists, policy-makers and professionals from many fields to step up with their expertise if we are going to redesign education to support our students. I've had some great experiences in PDs that were delivered by other professionals who have never worked in a classroom. I think the current problem is that "teachers aren't ordering." What I mean is that teachers need to have input into how priorities for teacher education are identified at the neighborhood, district, and

state level. They need to be involved in how those offerings are planned and delivered- this does not mean that they are the only ones who can. They will be the ones who are best prepared to support other teachers as they implement new strategies. They will need to gauge the impact on how changes to their practice impact their students and to have ways to report this information back to those who are creating policy. Teach Plus is very effective in developing teachers to be a part of the process and to become involved in decision-making all the way from their role as a direct service provider to their students to advising national policy makers.