



## *Linking to Learning*

By Bill Stamatis

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### Teachnet Institute promotes technology

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The venerable [Teachers Network](#) has been around for more than 28 years and focuses on professional development as the key to improving student achievement. During that time, it has doled out millions of dollars in grants to teachers, provided numerous online courses and developed a long list of resources that provide newer and experienced teachers with tools and strategies for implementing technology in their everyday classroom practices.

The site is rich with [instructional videos](#) from Teacher Network Productions that include topics like English as a second language, humanities for middle schools and teaching to multiple intelligences. The video “Project-Based Learning for English Language Learners,” that was directed and produced by the Teachers Network, won a prestigious CINE Golden Eagle Award in 2008.

Lesson plans are categorized by school subject, grade, popularity and whether they were written by veteran or newer teachers. The offerings seek to improve student learning by helping teachers integrate Web-based lessons into their instruction. The site also boasts national online mentors who can help with advice and lesson planning for newer teachers. Just go to the [New Teacher](#) Home link and then click on [Web Mentors](#).

You can always count on the Teachers Network to push the boundaries of its technology offerings. Besides the video resources, you can also find a small but growing library of [podcasts](#). Teachers Network received the Silver Reel Award in 2007 from the Media Communications Association-International in the category of Training/Education for its instructional podcast video, “Podcasting with Students.”

Sandy Scragg and Jill Williams, co-directors of technology programs for the Teachers Network, believed that if they could create a professional social network for New York City teachers who are passionate about technology, they could start a movement that would bring Web-based teaching and learning into schools at every level.

With that goal in mind, they founded the [Teachnet Institute](#) in 2008 and the 21 teachers accepted into the program have proven to be passionate about technology and have demonstrated an understanding of current educational technology tools and innovations and how they apply to learning.

Institute members meet mostly online (at <http://teachnetnyc.ning.com>), but also get together for professional development. Even though you cannot comment or participate in their online forums, you can follow them as these educational technologists toss ideas back and forth when they consider new ways to infuse a technology dimension into their curriculum units.

One online brainstorming session under the high school social studies group discussed the possibility of using Facebook or MySpace to teach the role of nationalism during the world war period of the last century. The idea centered on the ability to accept or reject friends as alliances. You can watch the idea morph as it is discussed.

There are blog posts about using Google Earth files for history classes and another starts a discussion regarding the possibility of using Twitter in the K-12 school environment. Or, consider the suggestion about how one school saved paper by using [Shutterfly](#) to create a free Web site so parents could read school notices and be aware of calendar events.

According to Scragg and Williams, the purpose of the institute was to bring together a diverse group of New York City educators and give them an opportunity to interact with other like-minded educational technologists in an experimental laboratory setting where they were free to be creative and have an opportunity to crystallize their thinking about technology in the classroom.

“It’s exciting to think that as a collective, if we continue to receive funding, we will be building an instructional database that could eventually be utilized by anyone and will provide teachers with the tools to keep their students on the cutting edge of Internet technology,” said institute member Brent Sackris, a special education teacher in Brooklyn.

If the funding comes through again for next year and you’re interested in taking part in this technology group, or if you want to add Web-based technology to your teaching repertoire, you should bookmark and stay tuned to the Teachnet Institute.