

Software developed by Little Planet Named Finalist in Codie Awards

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - A computer-based training program created for school principals by Little Planet Learning, Vanderbilt University and the Tennessee Department of Education has been named as a Codie Awards finalist.

The Codies, one of the software industry's highest honors, are given annually by the Software & Information Industry Association. Now in their 20th year, the Codies honor the best of the software, content and education technology industries.

The training program implemented by Little Planet Learning, educators at Peabody College of Vanderbilt and the state Department of Education was funded by a \$2,749,201 grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

The program, named the Institute for School Leaders, is helping principals in elementary, middle and high schools across the state achieve excellence as educational leaders, said Bill Nelson, Little Planet's president and chief executive officer.

"The Institute for School Leaders is helping Tennessee principals achieve their goal of being more than the managers of schools. They are taking their place as the top educators at their schools," Nelson said. "Being nominated for a Codie Award is a tremendous honor. The Codies are like the Academy Awards for the software industry."

To make the Institute for School Leaders a reality, Little Planet developed a three-day, instructor-led challenge-based learning experience for principals. During their training, they meet Principal Edwards, the fictional leader of a fictional school, and learn by helping him solve problems.

The training is so true to life that many participants come to think of Principal Edwards almost as a real person, said Pearl Sims, Director of the Leadership Development Center at Peabody College of Vanderbilt.

"The beauty of the work of Little Planet is that it brought Principal Edwards to life," she said.

The character of Principal Edwards becomes so real that some administrators have asked the actor who portrays him to visit their schools in real life.

The Institute for School Leaders is a true partnership involving a private business, educators and state government. Little Planet created the software that makes Principal Edwards come to life. Vanderbilt provided content expertise and research, and the state Department of Education provides expert facilitators and venues. So far 80 institutes have been held and more are scheduled.

Four top officials with the state Department of Education – Commissioner Lana Seivers, Deputy Commissioner Dr. Keith Brewer, Assistant Commissioner for Resource and Support Services Tim Webb and Assistant Commissioner for Teaching and Learning John Scott - were involved in the initial development of the Institute for School Leaders.

They also participated in the first training class.

Seivers said the project is very rewarding.

“The program has caused me to reflect on my past beliefs and practices and has been an energizing professional development activity that I think can make a difference in the lives of Tennessee’s children,” she said.

About Little Planet Learning

Little Planet creates custom, interactive Web- and computer-based training programs that help everyone, from frontline employees to corporate management, learn. Through learning experiences delivered by facilitators, computers and other technologies, the company teaches people to become experts in proprietary products, services, cultures and systems.

Little Planet is privately held and has offices in Nashville, Tenn., and in Boulder, Colo. The company has a full-time staff of 30 people. With its movie studio approach to projects, Little Planet has an extensive network of specialty resources to extend production capabilities.

About the Codie Awards

The Institute for School Leaders is a finalist in the category of Best Professional Development Product or Service for Educators. Winners will be announced May 25.

In 1986 the awards began as the Excellence in Software Awards. In 1993, they became the Codie Awards. Their name is derived from the word “code” and alludes to their basis in the software industry.