

Quality Teaching and Learning

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Three years ago I accepted a position in a small rural school system in the southern part of Virginia. The system was financially sound; however, it was in need of instructional leadership and teacher training. When I came on board, the leadership part had been partially addressed and soon all schools had new principals. The next logical step was teacher training for instructional improvements.

Last year our staff began the exciting journey of participating in Quality Teaching and Learning in an effort to engage teachers in the use of technology for learning, to add more rigor to the curriculum, and to focus staff members on meaningful academic communications. Like many “outside” in-service opportunities, we approached QTL with some trepidation and uncertainty. After talking with other neighboring districts who were QTL participants, our concerns were considerably diminished and then completely put to rest when the process began and our administrative team was trained first. The administrative training was excellent not only because it gave us hands on applications which we knew our teachers would love and implement, but also, because it brought us together as a team and gave us a renewed academic focus. In the weeks that followed, our staff members were involved in QTL activities that were both innovative and useful. The feed back that we received was very positive and in some cases jubilant. Comments like, “This is the best in-service we have ever had since I have been working here,” and, “I am enjoying the QTL process, and finally, I have some strategies that I can use in my classroom,” were commonplace. As the year progressed, principals were quick to note the increased use of technology by their staff members. Also, as part of the process, teachers met regularly with their peers to participate in whole faculty and departmental study group activities.

Recently, I had the unique experience of witnessing elementary teachers sharing teaching ideas and strategies in a large group setting. Even though the meeting was after school hours, in a school cafeteria, and teachers from three different

elementary schools were participating, what struck me was that the group was very enthusiastic and the atmosphere was vibrant and electric. Teachers listened, laughed and cheered each other on as study groups reported out on instructional items ranging from differentiation, kids pic, kidspiration, camcorder use, to data management. I mention this gathering as just one example of how participation in QTL has inspired our staff members to become better educators by taking ownership of the integration of technology to present content, by addressing different modalities of teaching, by linking concepts across the curriculum, and by communicating regularly with each other regarding student learning.

This fall our system will begin year two of QTL follow-up training, and we are very excited and thankful for the continuation of the process. Thanks in a large part to QTL our teachers are working more collaboratively to raise academic expectations and content rigor, and are utilizing best practices to enhance benchmark test scores. Some of our teachers have been so successful with the QTL strategies that they will be offering workshops to train our new teachers this fall during the new teacher work days. It is very rewarding to see teachers who pride themselves in becoming part of the “solution” and to see a once seemingly stagnant system grow into a real professional learning community. QTL continues to be a win/win for us.

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