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What attracted you to the Teach Plus TLPL program?

I was attracted to the Teach Plus program because I saw the opportunity to join a collaborative group of educators. After joining Teach Plus, I realized how vast those options and experiences were; I have led groups and come in contact with people that I never thought I would meet. I was also attracted to the program because Teach Plus affords participants the opportunity to conduct field studies on common problems of practice, collaborating on solutions with like-minded educators. I was overjoyed that teachers had the opportunity to share their expertise with others through the use of teacher-led professional development sessions!

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

This is my second year leading The K-2 Elementary ELA Collaborative Network- Teacher Tools Instructional Resources and Strategies to Build Success.

Why did you choose this particular topic(s)?

I chose this topic because literacy is everywhere and it is the foundation of almost every educational subject. I believe that students with a strong foundation in literacy can conquer the world. Being able to share my passion and proven strategies with other teachers is my dream. If I can help teachers refine their practice, I will help an insurmountable amount of students, including many I may never meet. Now that makes my heart smile!

What classroom experience do you bring to it?

I bring a variety of classroom experiences to this work. Through the years, I have been fortunate enough to work with some of the most gifted students, students with minor struggles, and students that began their school year as non-verbal learners. All of these experiences inform how I structure and teach my course.

What type of coaching did you receive from Teach Plus?

The coaching I received was very constructive and hands-on. The Teach Plus coach worked with me to establish our team's mission, vision, and strategy, and to develop ways to tackle our problem of practice.

How did this coaching help you in developing and facilitating the course?

We analyzed data from each session and walked through possible scenarios in preparation for sessions. My coach supported me with session materials and resources. No matter what I needed, my coach was always readily available and always willing to assist.

Can you describe the facilitation experience that you led?

During any given session, teachers would examine student data and teacher instruction and explore resources that met our targeted problem of practice. The team building activities and professional collaborations made our time together fly by.

What were the participants' reactions?

Many participants expressed their appreciation in the surveys conducted at the end of each session. I have also been told that my sessions are some of the most engaging professional development experiences that they have ever had.

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

The course participants frequently left feedback stating that the session directly impacted their teaching skills. Throughout my sessions, I created a safe space for the teachers to share what was and wasn't working. They explained how they utilized the action plan that we developed together and many have shared that my course has helped their students' academic achievement and to get better evaluation scores.

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

Teach Plus sessions are extremely collaborative and I am always able to hear about the teaching experiences of others. As a result, I learned a lot about the rigorous instruction provided to our students. I also learned a great deal about myself in regards to professional development. I now see how important it is to attend and provide interactive PD sessions. When I sit through PD that is not stimulating, I think about how this can be transformed in order to maximize learning experiences for teachers and ultimately students.

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

The TLPL is very interactive and moves according to the participants. For example, during our first meeting, we focused on isolating a common problem of practice. Next, we voted on and normed that problem to ensure that its depth met the needs of our students and aligned with the problem-solving cycle that we use to assess our work. This is a big difference from a typical PD session, where I would sit and passively take notes. In my sessions, I am facilitating rigorous discourse and actively listening, while other participants share artifacts, and elaborate on their classroom expertise.

What has been the effect of this work on your own classroom practice?

My work with Teach Plus has had a very positive effect on my personal classroom practice. As a teacher leader, I have been able to provide my students with many opportunities that they would not have necessarily had. It also caused me to analyze learning tasks through a more critical lens.

Do you feel that you've become a better teacher by participating in Teach Plus TLPL?

I do feel that I have become a better teacher by participating in the Teach Plus TLPL. Being a part of TLPL has expanded my professional learning network and empowered me to grow as an educator.

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

Four words: resistant but much needed. During my first few years of teaching, I felt like I had no idea what I was doing. I was very hesitant to speak out or share my thoughts with others. After a while, I began to get a nudge from my mentor and administration that pushed me to lead PD sessions within my school, the district, and ultimately the state. I am so glad that I overcame my shyness and stepped into my calling. It is such a blessing to be able to impact more than just one class of students each year.

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

I highly recommend attending Teach Plus sessions because they truly focus on your specific problem of practice. The means that educators get PD that is always relevant and driven by the work that we do each and every day with our students.

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

If all PD were teacher-led, the effect that it would have on the profession as a whole would be extremely positive! Teachers generally know what other teachers would like to see and learn during professional development seminars. As a result, teacher-led PD yields better quality and relatable sessions. Teachers are actively engaged and have a higher success rate of providing and implementing strategies gained during the PD. I have found that even the most resistant teachers are open to receiving information from a peer. Teacher-to-teacher professional development will change instruction for the better.