



North Carolina District Turns to CyberSmart! for 21st Century Professional Development

CyberSmart! Professional Development Helps Lenoir County Incorporate Authentic Learning and Creative Thinking Into Instruction

The State of North Carolina is in the forefront of the 21st century skills movement, adopting the policy that, "The guiding mission of the North Carolina State Board of Education is that every public school student will graduate from high school globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21st century."

Lenoir County Public Schools—a rural district with 17 schools, over 9,000 students, and 1,000 plus staff members—developed a technology plan that addresses the North Carolina policy in a number of ways and requires 20 to 30 percent of the technology budget to be used for staff development, including to "provide diverse professional development to support teachers in the development of 21st century skills and in integrating technology

into the curriculum." The plan cites the need for "Professional development planning including web 2.0 tools, interactive technologies, web-based resources, and the computer skills curriculum" and calls for the use of professional development opportunities that accommodate various and diverse schedules, including the use of online classes.

To provide professional development that would fulfill all these needs, Lenoir County turned to CyberSmart! Education. The County's Professional Development Specialist, Tezella Cline, explained, "I chose the CyberSmart! Online Workshop called Authentic Learning and Creativity to get our staff thinking about how to transform instruction into authentic and engaging tasks for students. I wanted to have our educators focus on developing relevant opportunities for students to develop critical thinking and creativity in the classroom."

CyberSmart!'s Authentic Learning and Creativity workshop equips educators with hands-on practice in



“Outstanding! I am most impressed and pleased with the work that you have done for us. The workshop was well aligned with the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards and met our district strategy to provide our professional staff with training to support the development of 21st century skills.”

— Tezella Cline
Professional Development Specialist
Lenoir County Public Schools

developing authentic learning tasks and encouraging creativity in a technology-enhanced environment. Topics include essential questions that drive learning, inquiry skills, problem-based learning, Web 2.0 tools, conditions needed to foster creativity, and social constructivist strategies.

During the four-week workshop, participants viewed multimedia presentations, conducted inquiry-based research in an online database of video interviews of experts, examined templates for creating authentic learning tasks, and collaborated in a wiki and in several discussion forums. Educators chose a final assignment option best suited to their professional needs and the needs of their students and shared their products and results with fellow participants.

In an end-of-workshop evaluation, 100 percent of participants rated the overall experience as "excellent" or "good." 100 percent "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement, "I feel comfortable discussing authentic learning and modeling creative thinking in the context of my work," a significant shift from the 45 percent who responded this way before the workshop.

Juan Carlos Mari, ESL Lead Teacher, commended his district for providing digital learning opportunities, "The fact that Lenoir County Public Schools is becoming so engaged with the digital teaching environments is wonderful. I believe that students will become more engaged now that they see administrators and teachers shifting into the digital gear."

Reflecting as the workshop was drawing to a close, Maria Delgado, Woodington Middle School ESL Teacher noted, "[The workshop] definitely changes my thinking and habits of learning and acquiring 21st century skills so now I am determined to do the same with my students."

Lois Sutton, Kinston High School Business Teacher, commented "I've always tried to make things real in my classroom but this has pushed me to step it up. Lesson learned: Is this lesson AUTHENTIC?"

"I loved the flexibility of this online staff development," commented Megan Fader, teacher of fourth grade academically gifted students at Northwest School in Kinston. "... because I could do the workshop from the comfort of home, I could really focus on the new knowledge at my own pace. After having read something online at home, I often caught myself wondering about it throughout the day at school. That is another reason why I liked having it spaced out over several weeks, as opposed to the traditional one day workshop."



"This CyberSmart! workshop is relevant for all teachers because they can tailor the assignments to match their specific discipline. As a result, they will be better equipped with 21st century tools and skills to make learning fun, thought provoking, and relevant for their students."

— Diane Heath
Principal of Woodington Middle School