

Why Should We Go?

Exploring the Impact of a Literacy Conference on Preservice Teachers' Literacy Conference

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Abstract

Conferences are a potential way to support preservice teachers and their early professional development. Following the 2015 TALE conference, preservice teachers from Corpus Christi, Texas were asked about the conference's impact on their learning. This chapter highlights the reflections of these preservice teachers

Article II, Section 3 of the Texas Association for Literacy Education (TALE) Bylaws states that one core value of the organization is that “literacy professionals are committed to serving the learners in this state ...through leadership in the design of programs and in support of preservice and inservice teachers, other literacy leaders, and teacher educators (higher education)” (TALE, 2015). I feel strongly that the TALE conference is an important way to support preservice teachers and their early professional development.

Currently, I teach and mentor preservice teachers and reinforce the importance of self-initiated professional development. When presenting the option of attending the conference to my preservice teachers, undoubtedly, I get the usual questions about cost, location, and length. One question that stood out to me the most was, “Why should I go?” I was taken aback at first by this question, but knowing these students and the desire they had for learning new instructional techniques on their way to accomplishing their goal of becoming a teacher, I decided to probe further. I did not believe that these undergraduate students were perpetuating the *What's in it for me?* culture that affects many young

[Texas Association for Literacy Education Yearbook: Inspiring and Transforming Literacy, Volume 3](#)

Johnson, pp. 67-72

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ISSN: 2374-0590 online

professionals in our society. Therefore, I asked these students what they meant by their question. Their reply was that because they did not have their own classroom, yet they did not know if they would be able to implement anything they learned right away. They did not want it to be a sit-and-get experience without practical application.

In spite of this concern by some, TALE did have many preservice teachers who made the decision to attend the 2015 Literacy Conference held at Sam Houston State University. After the conference, I overheard preservice teachers from my institution, Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi, discussing their experiences at the 2015 TALE conference and decided to interview three preservice teacher attendees. I wanted to determine aspects of the conference which were beneficial to preservice teachers and what they would share with other preservice teachers who were unsure about attending conferences in the future. The two interview questions I asked were:

1. How did attending the 2015 TALE conference impact you?
2. What reasons for attendance would you give preservice teachers who asked why they should go to a future TALE conference?

All three preservice teachers mentioned the address given by keynote speaker Steven Layne.

Preservice Teacher One said:

Steven Layne's talk about being on fire for literacy really made an impact on me. I loved how passionate he was about literacy and reading, and it definitely inspired me. I loved the "hot reads" idea, and that is what gave me the inspiration to come up with Must Read Mondays for the Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi Student Reading Council page on Facebook. With his story about the school gathering for the weekly hot read, I realized that literacy can't just come from the classroom - it has to come from the community. Reading has to be a community priority.

Preservice Teacher Two shared:

Upon returning from the conference, I immediately created my own "Hot Read" sign, that Steven Layne told us about, and incorporated it into the classroom where I was student teaching. My students were so surprised and asked me, "Mrs. Bush, you read?" I found the students really wanting to read what I was reading, and I could see how Mr. Layne's suggestions helped me ignite a passion for reading.

Preservice Teacher Three stated:

Steven Layne made a really strong impression on me, and I was able to walk away from his presentation feeling I like I could actually make a difference in a child's life.

For two of the preservice teachers, a conference session on guided reading impacted them the most as they returned to work with a group of students they were tutoring. They both attended "How to Make the Most of Your Guided Reading Groups," presented by Jennifer Burchfiel from Irving ISD.

Preservice Teacher Three said:

The presenter gave us really helpful tips and taught us how to plan an effective guided reading lesson. For instance, she told us to use sticky notes in our guiding reading plan and place them on the cover of the teacher's copy of the book for easy reference. This idea is much more practical than flipping through our lesson plan that's on an 8x11 piece of paper. What I really liked about her session was that she actually engaged us in her presentation. She gave us each a book and several sticky notes and had us practice writing our guided reading lesson plans on them. Best of all, the instructor at the lesson gave each of us a free children's book! Once I got back to Corpus Christi, I immediately applied what I learned from that session into the tutoring I was doing at [the primary school]. I planned my guided reading lesson using only sticky notes and executed my very first guided reading. To my surprise, it went smoothly! My guided reading with my small group went really well, and I think it was because of the session I went to at TALE.

As an aside, she added:

What was really funny was that while I was doing a guided reading with my small group, so was [Preservice Teacher One]! When I looked over to her table and saw that she too had sticky notes on her guided reading book, I was really excited! We had a quick laugh over that funny coincidence and went back to our lessons.

One of the preservice teachers mentioned discovering a new favorite book to share with students. Preservice Teacher One told me that another session that impacted her was about culturally diverse books being used in the classroom. She shared:

I ended up discovering one of my most favorite pictures books, One, by Katherine Otoshki. They provided a very wide variety of titles for culturally and socially diverse books.

All three preservice teachers mentioned the overall community and networking they saw take place among the educators who attended the conference, regardless of what their grade level or years of experience. Preservice Teacher Three ended her interview with what I believe is one of the important goals of TALE as an organization and the purpose of the annual conference, stating:

The TALE conference played a huge factor in helping me grow as a preservice teacher. All in all, I am really glad that I went to the TALE conference because I learned some new methods to teach literacy that weren't taught in my college classrooms so far.

Preservice Teacher One knew exactly what she would tell other preservice teachers who were unsure about attending a future conference saying:

I would tell them that it is worth the time! It is a great opportunity to meet in-service educators and learn more about the profession. I was able to learn more about literacy and become even more passionate about it.

The 2015 TALE conference not only inspired and transformed the literacy instruction of these three preservice teachers in attendance, but it also ignited the desire to inspire and transform the literacy lives of their future students.

References

Texas Association for Literacy Education. (2015). *Bylaws*. Retrieved from <http://www.texasreaders.org/bylaws.html>.