

Student Teacher Program

Texas State University

Texas State University was founded in 1899 in response to the state's need for trained public school teachers. Over a hundred-year period, the school has gone from a teachers' college to a multipurpose university. Still honoring its founding as a teachers' college, Texas State certifies more teachers than any other school in Texas. It has been recognized by the Association of Teacher Educators as one of the top three teacher education programs in the country, and is headquarters to various education initiatives helping future educators prepare for the challenges of public education today.

The Challenge

Early field experiences in classrooms are a valuable component of pre-service teachers' professional development. This is a time when teacher candidates experience the context of schools and begin to observe the everyday happenings from a teacher perspective. However, pre-service teachers generally enter the classroom with a lack of knowledge about students. According to Fuller's model of teacher development (1969), early concerns for novice teachers revolve almost exclusively around their own teaching adequacy and classroom management issues. Most pre-service teachers do not focus their attention on student needs until very late in the student teaching experience. Collaborative action research provides a method to help teacher candidates move beyond novice concerns to focus more quickly on the needs and perspectives of the students they teach. Creative Fire LLC was hired by Texas State University to develop a collaborative action research component for its student teaching program designed to help pre-service teachers at the secondary level increase their understandings of students.

The Solution

Context. In this project, Creative Fire LLC was responsible for both developing and facilitating a collaborative action research component for Texas State University's student teacher program. The component itself works as an embedded element of the semester-long student teaching experience, and intentionally plays a supporting role to the supervision provided to pre-service teachers by their university supervisor, or mentor, and classroom teacher. In this context, the classroom teacher serves as the student teacher's primary guide in the day-to-day realities of teaching, the university mentor supplements that information with a focus on quality instruction and lesson design, and Creative Fire's collaborative action research component helps teacher candidates develop a deeper understanding of the students they teach.

"When we want to understand something we cannot just stand outside and observe it. We have to enter deeply into it and be one with it in order to really understand it."

— Thich Nhat Hanh

Vision. The collaborative action research component designed by Creative Fire has three broad goals:

1. To help teacher candidates both develop a greater understanding of the students they teach and translate that knowledge into a more personalized learning environment.
2. To apply constructivist theory to teacher education, guiding pre-service teachers to become active learners and responsive problem solvers.
3. To use collaborative learning to facilitate a supportive environment that enables teacher candidates to learn from others by sharing ideas

Framework. Creative Fire organizes the collaborative action research component into two main sections: a brief introduction on collaborative action research, and a collaborative action research project. Typically, research groups are comprised of five student teachers and a Creative Fire consultant. Throughout the collaborative action research component, the Creative Fire consultant guides the collaborative action research process while facilitating shared inquiry and reflective dialogue to maximize this unique learning opportunity.