

**How do we work with the raw talent of newly graduated teachers to move them to expertise and confidence as quickly as possible?**

“In my personal opinion, I believe that graduate programs of education need to re-tune their curricula. From my own experience, as well as in discussions with many teachers both new and seasoned, the most useful and effective courses focus on what is practical and specific to the everyday operation of a classroom. Whether related to reading instruction for English Language Learners (ELLs), handling classroom management, or ways to differentiate for students with special needs, courses that emphasize a diversity of methods and techniques give all teachers, especially those who are new to the profession, a way to address the varying needs of students and their different learning styles. In my own experience, my ESL “methods class” with Dr. Ana Chamot of the George Washington University proved to be invaluable during my very first year of teaching. Her class was comprehensive, relevant, and especially practical because it exposed me to numerous ways to approach reading instruction for my ELLs while also addressing the wide range of student interests and abilities. An understanding of educational theory is helpful and necessary for teachers, but coursework grounded in classroom-tested best practices offers new teachers the valuable opportunity to meet the immediate needs of the pupils in front of them.

However, even the best courses cannot possibly prepare new teachers for what they will experience in an actual classroom. In my opinion, the best teacher preparation programs not only desire, but *mandate*, internship/fellowship opportunities in addition to school visitation and student teaching. My graduate program placed me in a local high school for an entire school year. Paired with an experienced cooperating teacher, I was given opportunities to practice and reflect on what I was learning during my university classes – months before my “official” student teaching. Having the ability to “try before you buy” and then obtain feedback from an experienced mentor allowed me to gain the confidence I needed to successfully begin both my student teaching and my career. While shortcuts and alternatives to a traditional teaching license do exist, the investment of time and effort in a full-time internship, when paired with methods-based graduate classes, offers a deep portfolio of skills and experience that is hard to replicate elsewhere.

Teaching is not an easy profession. The needs of students, parents, administrators, and legislators are ever changing. The teacher is the constant. In order to best serve their constituency, teachers need relevant and purposeful preparation that is grounded in hands-on practice. That has been my recipe for success and I believe that research is now available to substantiate my beliefs. I thank the International Reading Association for the opportunity to participate in this important dialogue on teacher preparation.