

literacy

evidence-based



research

reading

best

Investment in Teacher Preparation in the United States

instruction

practice

valid

instruction

reliable

reading

results

systematic

literacy

best practice

reading

instruction

research

objective

A POSITION

STATEMENT

OF THE

INTERNATIONAL

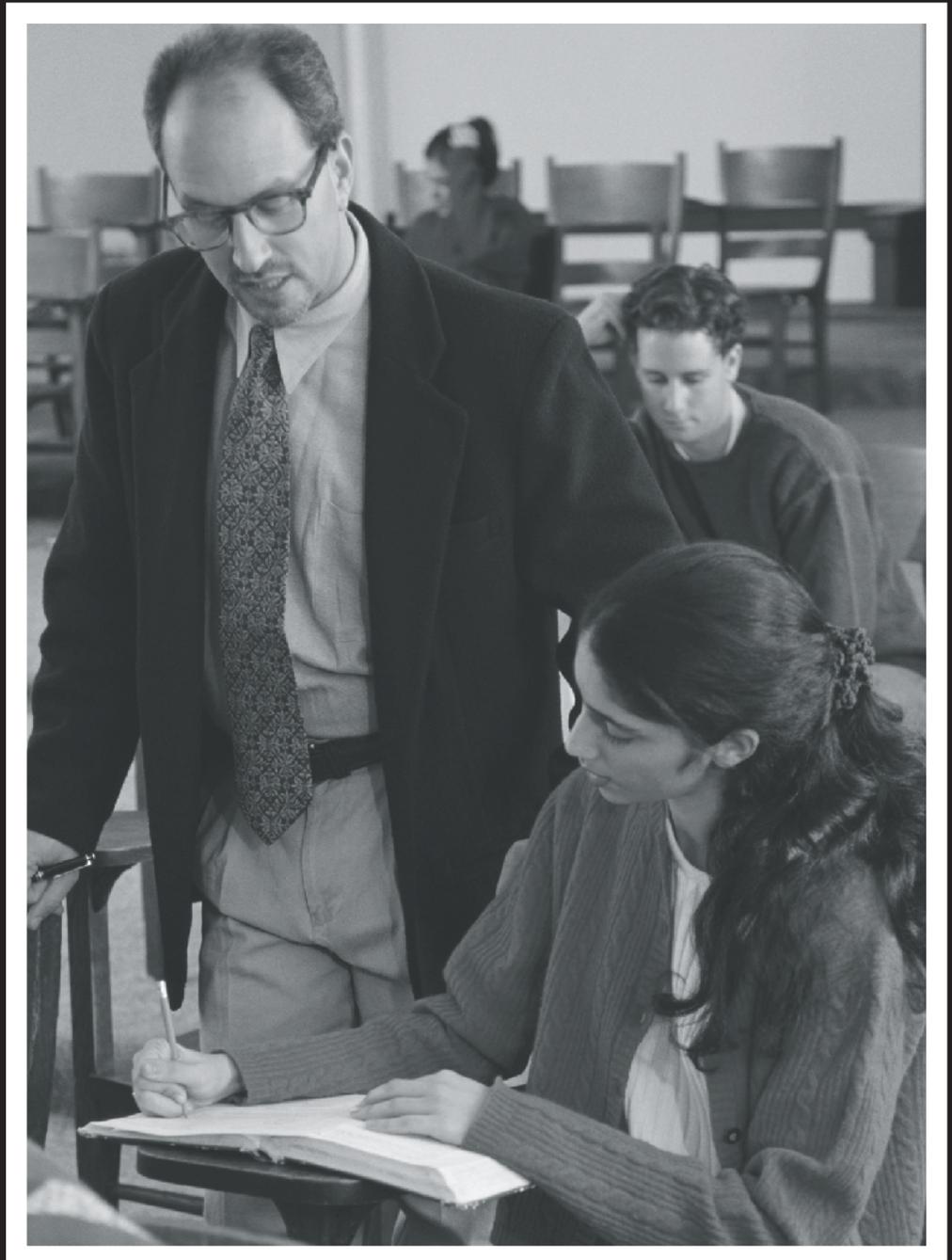
READING

ASSOCIATION

peer-reviewed

scientific

achievement



Preparing beginning teachers in the United States to teach reading well must be a top priority. Currently, there is great variability in the competence of beginning teachers as they emerge from their teacher preparation programs. Some beginning teachers have as many as 24 semester hours of work related to reading instruction while others have as few as 3 semester hours (Hoffman & Roller, 2001). Better-prepared teachers who are competent to teach reading are essential if national and state goals for closing the reading achievement gap (i.e., differences in reading achievement between African American, Hispanic, and Native American students and their white counterparts) are to be realized.

In the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the U.S. federal government focused unprecedented resources (more than \$1 billion per year for a period of six years) on reading instruction in high-poverty, low-performing schools. If we want to close the achievement gap in the United States, targeted resources and professional development are absolutely essential. However, without a simultaneous investment in improving teacher preparation programs, we will continually be faced with beginning teachers who are under-prepared to deliver high-quality reading instruction. Thus, the International Reading Association calls for a major national investment in teacher preparation. We must ensure that every beginning teacher is competent to teach reading from the first day on the job.



Standards for Reading Teacher Preparation Programs

Every teacher must receive quality preparation on all aspects of research-based reading pedagogy. Teacher education programs must get preservice teachers off to a running start on acquiring the knowledge, skill, and will it takes to be an effective teacher. The International Reading Association has standards for the preparation of classroom reading teachers

(International Reading Association, 1998). In brief, every teacher education program in the United States should ensure that its students

Foundational Knowledge and Dispositions

- know how reading develops
- know how oral language helps students acquire written language
- know how to read research reports and appropriately adapt classroom practices to match research evidence

Instructional Strategies and Curriculum Materials

- know how to select curriculum materials and help students learn how letter-sound relationships work
- know how to teach students to make sense out of the texts they read
- know how to develop strategic readers and writers
- know how to match curriculum materials to students' needs and levels of competence

Assessment, Diagnosis, and Evaluation

- know how to assess the progress of every student and change instruction when it is not working
- know how to communicate results of assessments to various stakeholders, especially parents

Creating a Literate Environment

- know how to set up, organize, and manage a classroom so that students can and will learn to read
- know how to motivate students to do their best work
- know enough about and value the cultures and languages students bring to school to use those differences as resources rather than as excuses for not teaching them well

Professional Development

- get their practical experience under the best teachers our schools can provide as mentors
- continue to receive mentoring support throughout their

first five years of teaching

- participate in, initiate, implement, and evaluate professional development programs

Preparing Teachers to Close the Reading Achievement Gap

Closing the achievement gap in reading is essential; however, this task will not be simple. High-poverty, low-performing schools must have excellent reading teachers. Currently, they have the least prepared, least experienced teachers (Education Week, 2003). Reversing this situation so that the best teachers teach the students who most need expert teachers will require a comprehensive approach. Teachers in these schools, and indeed in all sites, must be well prepared to implement research-based programs and practices, and they must have the knowledge and skill to use professional judgment when those programs and practices are not working for particular children. Every link in the professional preparation of reading teachers—from preservice to induction to inservice professional development—must be strong so that teachers have the knowledge and skill necessary to exercise informed professional judgments. Only if teachers are well prepared to implement research-based practices and have the professional knowledge and skill to alter those practices when they are not appropriate for particular children will every child learn to read.

Teacher preparation and professional development alone cannot erase the reading achievement gap. Much more attention must be paid to the work conditions surrounding teachers. In a recent study, the Educational Testing Service (Bruschi & Coley, 1999) reported that

on average, teachers perform as well as other college-educated adults across all three literacy scales [of the National Adult Literacy Survey]. Teachers with four-year degrees performed similarly to others with four-year degrees, and teachers with graduate studies or degrees perform at a comparable level to other adults with graduate studies or degrees. (p. 3)

However, teachers did not have salaries comparable to their counterparts. The authors note, “There are large differences in earnings between teachers and other managerial and professional workers. Teachers rank near the bottom of the list” (p. 3).

The Need for Research

Research on the effectiveness of reading teacher preparation programs is sparse. To date there are large-scale studies that examine relationships among broad variables such as certification, program length, and subject matter knowledge (Whitehurst, 2002) or fine-grained studies that examine training related to developing teacher expertise on very specific topics such as teaching comprehension strategies (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). The International Reading Association’s National Commission on Excellence for Reading Teacher



Preparation has completed the first and only quasi-experimental study of teacher preparation for reading instruction that simultaneously includes multiple sites, multiple data sources (including interview, observation, and student achievement data), and longitudinal data. It joins the nine studies reviewed by the National Reading Panel indicating that preservice teacher preparation does impact beginning teachers. It extends these findings to suggest that effective reading teacher preparation improves student reading achievement.

Given the crucial role of the teacher in providing excellent reading instruction, it is appalling that we can point to only one such study. In an era in which everyone is calling for evidence-based

practice, there is very little evidence. We call on the U.S. federal government for a major investment in reading teacher preparation research. We encourage teacher educators to conduct research on their teacher preparation programs. We cannot have evidence-based teacher preparation with the paucity of existing evidence.

Recommendations

Teacher educators must

- take advantage of existing resources to improve preparation for reading instruction,
- aggressively advocate for more resources to improve preparation for reading instruction,
- extend teacher education

programs through the first years of teaching to provide adequate support for excellent reading instruction, and

- conduct research on teacher preparation programs and their ultimate impact on student achievement.

Federal, state, and local policymakers must

- focus resources on improving teacher preparation for reading instruction,
- hold educators accountable for using increased resources for increased teacher competence in reading instruction, and
- invest in research programs focused on teacher preparation for reading instruction.

Related Resources From the International Reading Association

Books

Roller, C.M. (Ed.). (2001). *Learning to teach reading: Setting the research agenda*.

Journal Articles

Cantrell, S.C. (2002). Promoting talk: A framework for reading discussion in teacher education courses. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 45*, 642–651.

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Hausenblas, O. (2002). Whose knowledge? Which knowledge? Reflections on teacher education. *Thinking Classroom/Peremena, 3*, 47–48.

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Lefever-Davis, S. (2002). The preparation of tomorrow's reading teachers. *The Reading Teacher, 56*, 196–197.

Maloch, B., Fine, J., & Flint, A.S. (2002/2003). "I just feel like I'm ready": Exploring the influence of quality teacher preparation on beginning teachers. *The Reading Teacher, 56*, 348–350.

Maring, G.H., Levy, E.W., & Schmid, J.A. (2002). Variations on a cybermentoring theme: Six literacy projects involving preservice teachers and students across grade levels. *Reading Online, 6*(4). Available: http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=maring2/index.html

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- Education Week. (2003). *Quality counts 2003: If I can't learn from you...: Ensuring a highly qualified teacher for every classroom*. Washington, DC: Author.
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