

## Three Interviews of graduates of the Reading and Development (RLD) Advanced Program

A graduate assistant (GA) interviews three recent graduates of our new RLD program.

The GA asked the same questions to each alumna and recorded a summary of each. Overall, alumnae were extremely satisfied with their preparation. We are still analyzing the results and will include in our SSR.

### Alumna 1 Interview

How well did Fairfield prepare you? For example, how prepared were you to:

\*Uses the Wilson program a lot...this is a program that would not have been available to her without Fairfield\*

\* **explain the content you teach**

- Felt very prepared for this
- The two practicums were very helpful in this because they provided her with experience
- Speaking to peers also helped because they learned different strategies from one another

\* **use different teaching strategies and methods**

- Completed 2 practicums
- Both gave experience to different strategies and methods
- Trained in structured literacy approach
  - Got to learn particular nuances with how they delivered content to students
- Felt prepared in dealing with students and different abilities they would have

\* **make real world or interdisciplinary connections for your students**

- Right away you get experience working with students and families
- And providing feedback
- A lot of hands on experience
- Got to REALLY practice through hands on experience
- Super important for her when she was looking for a program because she got the experience, gave those assessments to students, two practicums (getting more than one) → got to work with different students and different disabilities

\* **collaborate with your students' families**

- A lot of experience with this
- Evals for summer clinics and diagnostic classes
- Assessed a student twice with a battery of assessment → talked to parents after to give feedback and go over results
- Put together an entire report and had a formal conference with the family

- Did this a third time in practicum
- \* **uphold professional ethics**
  - Comes in with the whole program
  - Deal with students and families
  - Tolis provided examples of how reports should look, how you should communicate with parents with this, how to word language in reports
    - She would sit in on conferences, would sit in with you and help to explain to the parents
    - Super helpful to see her in action
    - “Having a professor that I could watch engage in those activities, I was able to get more experience myself so now if that question comes up for me I know how to respond and what language to use.”
- \* **engage in relevant Personal Development opportunities**
  - Having the knowledge and feeling knowledgeable about students with disabilities helped to give her more confidence in this area
- \* **differentiate instruction to different learner needs**
  - Variety of age groups
  - Differentiating instruction was really huge
  - Student was a 5th grader, but she was able to work on longer words vs starting with a student at the beginning at Wilson
  - Giving diagnostic assessments and then basing instruction off of that
- \* **develop appropriate scope and sequence**
  - Particularly in the summer clinic
  - Used assessments to determine what the best scope and sequence was for each individual student → learning how to help students on the individual level in the short window they had in about 4 or 5 weeks at the summer clinic
- \* **manage your classroom**
  - Learned a lot about this in the Wilson practicum
  - Right now especially with remote learning you have to learn how to engage students and keep them focused
  - Got a lot of experience/training
  - Taught to utilize kinesthetic movements
  - Structured literacy and Wilson approaches look at how the student moves through the lesson, constantly changing things up
- \* **address challenging student behavior**
  - Learned a lot about this in the Wilson practicum
  - Wilson program really helps to outline how you should deal with challenging student behavior when it comes up
  - Some of her peers had more experience with challenging student behavior just based on their practicum placement
- \* **engage students in critical thinking**
  - Training in Wilson is very helpful in that
  - Learn about the language in English and how the words are formed
  - Engage in a lot of questions → how many syllables does that word have

- Helps students to get the proper language down
- Students are getting experience with word programs
- Comprehension strategies
  - Involving the kids actively in their learning
- Manipulating cards to perform a task, kids are always aware of the expectation of the lesson, how and why
- Kids are thinking about what they are learning, a lot connections between what they're learning
- A lot of practice and support in critical thinking
  - She knows what to ask to engage students, and different strategies to use
- \* **use flexible student grouping strategies**
  - The Wilson program really helped with this along with the practicum experience
  - Putting students who are struggling in one with those who are really succeeding in that same area so that they can learn from their peers
- \* **use strategies for ELLs**
  - Really good course→ with Dr. Ruby
    - Provided a lot of strategies
    - Implemented a lot of the techniques that she learned in that class uses them often with students
    - Teaching different strategies for ELLs
    - Wilson program was very helpful
    - Put two spanish speakers with students who had stronger letter sound skills and that was very helpful
- \* **use strategies for students with disabilities**
  - That obviously is a major focus of the program
  - A lot of reading
  - Looked at dyslexia, how it presented, how to assess, how to intervene
    - Strategies for those types of students
  - Even going into meetings→ felt so strong in her knowledge of reading disabilities that she could advocate for students MIN 8:30 QUOTES
    - “Even as a professional when I went into IEP meetings with my students, or you know, we were referring a child for special education. I felt so much more knowledgeable about my foundation in my knowledge of reading and my knowledge of reading disabilities that I felt like I could contribute in meetings and advocate for students.”
- \* **use data to adjust instruction**
  - Wilson program really deals with this
  - Will have students read words to determine their level so you can adjust
  - Diagnostic courses really helped
    - Battery of assessments, then offer parents strategies to help their parents, what to ask the school, area of focus for your child at the time→ so big emphasis on not only how to use data for instruction but the how to use that and communicate it to parents



## Alumna 2 Interview

How well did Fairfield prepare you? For example, how prepared were you to:

**\* explain the content you teach**

- The practicum and fellowship were very helpful in this
  - Hands on real-life experience was most significant in her learning
- Cohort was great for support and learning from each other
- Through the different experiences and collaboration with her cohort she learned different strategies for explaining content
- Program prepared her well so that she felt she had a strong understanding of reading, and this helped her to be more confident in explaining the material

**\* use different teaching strategies and methods**

- She had two placements in two different districts
- Able to observe teachers and reading specialists
- Learning different strategies for different levels of readers
- Uses different techniques that she learned there that are not used in her district
- Learned from peer experiences as well because all districts use different programs
- Practicum → “Those were invaluable. I can’t even imagine doing a program without practicum. Dr. Tolis, I think, was very diligent in getting us to have these hands on practicums at the Dyslexia center in Norwalk and the other one in Southport.”
- Assessment class allowed her to apply different strategies with her students to quickly assess them and identify areas of weakness and tailor her instruction to these areas
- Never felt thrown into the practicum experiences, was able to observe first but eventually was able to be independent
- Offered a lot of opportunities for this program “I don’t know how much more prepared I could have been coming out of it”

**\* make real world or interdisciplinary connections for your students**

- Difficult in terms of reading development
- Brought to her attention that she should show her students that reading is everywhere, in all subjects
- If kids are struggling readers they’re going to have difficulties in math as well

**\* collaborate with your students' families**

- Allowed her to know better what to assess with them
- To know what advice to give and how they can help their kids at home
- Encouraging parents to read and write with kids at home
- Helped her to know how to talk about their areas of weaknesses in PPTs and conferences
- Felt like she was prepared and understood different aspects of reading

**\* uphold professional ethics**

- Throughout the program they were being prepared with information to help students
- Learned how to practice patience with students because she was able to understand their difficulties

- Learning how to deal with and talk to parents appropriately
- Being able to make suggestions to teachers who may not have been using these strategies
- \* **differentiate instruction to different learner needs**
  - Assessment class helped her to be able to learn which assessments to pull to get a baseline for struggling readers and their areas of weakness
  - Based on assessment she could differentiate her instruction
  - Being able to assess helps to understand what they can and can't do
- \* **manage your classroom**
  - Not in the classroom anymore, she is dividing group support
  - She is able to apply what she learned from the program more significantly in this role of small group instruction
  - She feels she was prepared to manage small groups and a classroom
- \* **address challenging student behavior**
  - In practicum she had a student with a behavior problem
    - Child had dyslexia
  - She learned about dyslexia, and this helped her to understand that the behavior wasn't defiant, but it was out of frustration
  - "Students may present defiant behavior or difficult challenging behavior, but it might not be coming from a place of defiance but coming from a place of frustration."
- \* **create a respectful classroom environment**
  - Being able to understand how struggling readers may have impacts in other areas allowed her to better understand student behavior
  - The placements were helpful because she was able to see what strategies other teachers used to do this, and how effective they were
    - Able to see what worked and what did not
- \* **engage students in critical thinking**
  - Given different strategies and techniques throughout classes and placements that they could use with students
- \* **use flexible student grouping strategies**
  - Placements were huge in this, in modeling effective ways to group
  - It can easily be done incorrectly and not effectively
  - Watching the teachers in placement → seeing what worked and what didn't
- \* **use strategies for ELLs**
  - Given preparation for how to speak/reach out to parents of ELL students
  - Again with assessment, being able to assess what areas a student needs help in
  - Were taught different strategies that could be helpful to use with ELL students
  - Collaborating with peers → through experiences that peers in her cohort had she learned different strategies
- \* **use strategies for students with disabilities**
  - The classes focused heavily on learning about students with reading disabilities, so she felt very prepared in this
  - Assessment course helped her to understand the importance of being able to adjust instruction if a student is still struggling

- Not all students need the same strategy, so being prepared with various strategies that she could try if one wasn't working for a student
- \* **plan instruction around learning standards**
  - The districts now plan education around the standards
  - The program helped to learn them better
  - They learned how to separate different standards
  - Taught before the program, and did not understand the standards prior to the program which made it hard to properly plan instruction
- \* **use data to adjust instruction**
  - Watching teachers during placement
  - Making sure you hit their targeted areas of need in your instruction
  - Learned the significance of the data
  - Informal tests every week on the kids in her practicum → to help inform and adjust instruction
  - Even simple assessments helped
- \* **use technology to promote deeper learning**
  - She doesn't use technology that much
  - She did learn about reading programs, especially for dyslexia
  - Had background before her PD
- \* **provide helpful and timely feedback to students**
  - What they learned broadened their understanding of reading → this helped her to be more specific with her feedback so that students would understand what they needed to do and why
  - Helped her students to understand it was a process

## Alumna 3 Interview

How well did Fairfield prepare you? For example, how prepared were you to:

- \* **explain the content you teach**
  - Very prepared
  - 102 cert and masters
  - Assessment classes→ dove in conversationally
    - Practicum got to test students for assessments
    - Performing live on students
- \* **use different teaching strategies and methods**
  - A lot of teaching strategy dialogues between classmates→ bouncing ideas off of each other
  - Live practicum experience was most beneficial
- \* **make real world or interdisciplinary connections for your students**
  - Can't answer
- \* **collaborate with your students' families**
  - Not as prepared for this
  - Just given information and it was just like you could share this with families if you want, but not specifically how to talk to families
- \* **uphold professional ethics**
  - Didn't talk as much about professional ethics
  - Didn't have what you should wear or how you should say things, was just assumed
  - "That's one thing that the program is lacking, no class on what is a reading specialist"
- \* **engage in relevant Personal Development opportunities**
  - Seen videos throughout the courses that helped them to learn
  - Not really prepared specifically for Personal Development or what they could do on their own time
- \* **differentiate instruction to different learner needs**
  - Yes, definitely taken care of
  - Different tiers of readers
- \* **develop appropriate scope and sequence**
  - Program provided lots of scope and sequence for reading and writing
  - Lots of discussions about this
- \* **manage your classroom**
  - Did not discuss this much directly
  - Talking between classmates would be the only way this was addressed, this was informal
- \* **address challenging student behavior**
  - Did not really talk about student behavior, just how to intervene
- \* **create a respectful classroom environment**
  - Sort of→ program didn't really teach how to do a respectful environment
    - Learned this through experience and practicum
- \* **engage students in critical thinking**

- One class specifically really touched on this
- Teaching students how to think critically and look at different subject areas
- Maureen Ruby's class
- \* **use flexible student grouping strategies**
  - There's no science to it really
  - It was discussed
  - But really it is whatever works for your classroom so you just have to try it out
- \* **use strategies for ELLs**
  - Definitely talked about this every semester
  - Picture-word associations is huge
  - Using an explicit program is important so there is no room for confusion
    - Phonics program
  - Good to have knowledge about cognates is important
  - Didn't talk too much about testing, only touched the surface of one
- \* **use strategies for students with disabilities**
  - Partly, focused a lot on Dyslexia
    - Or auditory disabilities/disorders
    - Kids with possible dysgraphia
    - Tier 2 and 3 kids specific to reading
  - Not necessarily students with severe disabilities
- \* **plan instruction around learning standards**
  - Not really
  - Learned it by having to do it
  - Fairfield did not really link to standards
- \* **use data to adjust instruction**
  - Yes, different types of data analysis throughout the whole program
  - Wilson program is lesson by lesson constantly adjusting based on data
- \* **use technology to promote deeper learning**
  - Definitely, even as simple as creating powerpoints
  - Maureen Ruby's class → read about how to get kids to question reading
    - How to present information for best learning
  - Given resources to use to help them when they were in the field
- \* **provide helpful and timely feedback to students**
  - Wilson program really teaches, this was most helpful for suggestion
  - Classes were more content based