

The Making of a Windward Teacher **by Sandra Schwarz, Director of Windward Teaching Training Program**

In "The Missing Foundation in Teacher Education" (1996), Dr. Louisa Moats, a renowned researcher in the field of learning disabilities, declared, "Until we recognize that teachers do not naturally acquire the kind of expertise in language structure that is required of them for remediating and preventing reading problems, we will neglect to provide the necessary training." Fifteen years later, a report from the International Dyslexia Association (2011) reaffirms Moats' assertion stating, "Teaching language, reading, and writing effectively, especially to students experiencing difficulty, requires considerable knowledge and skills. Regrettably, the licensing and professional development practices currently endorsed by many states are insufficient for the preparation and support of teachers and specialists. The majority of practitioners at all levels has not been prepared in sufficient depth to prevent reading problems, to recognize early signs of risk, or to teach students with dyslexia and related learning disabilities successfully." In 2023, a report from the National Council of Teacher Quality found that only 54% of teacher prep programs provided sufficient coverage of early reading components.

Tragically, teaching candidates in undergraduate and graduate education programs are **still** not receiving adequate instruction in the foundations of language. To address this gap, The Windward School provides its teachers with a detailed background in the structure of language. The School has designed a teacher training program that is comprehensive, demanding and extremely effective in closing the knowledge gap between research and teaching practices. Professional training at Windward is an ongoing program that begins before a teacher steps into a classroom and continues as long as a teacher remains on the faculty.

Teachers new to Windward, even very experienced ones, begin their careers at Windward as a Teacher-in-Residence in the Windward Teacher Training Program (WTP). The hiring of Teachers-in-Residence starts with an exhaustive recruitment process. Candidates are culled from a large pool of applicants. College career centers, job fairs, online advertisements, employment agencies, private referrals and unsolicited resumes are all sources of applications. Every resume is read and analyzed for proper credentials and special talents, skills, and interests. In choosing potential Teachers-in-Residence, administrators look for candidates who possess strong language skills, a passion for working with children with learning disabilities and the dedication necessary to becoming a teacher. When a candidate is chosen for an interview, a team of administrators meets with the candidate, explains the Windward program in depth and analyzes the candidate's answers to carefully selected questions. A thorough reference check is completed before a candidate is offered a position. A future Windward teacher must also have patience, a strong work ethic, an intellectual curiosity, and an appreciation for being part of an organization that transforms children's lives.

Hundreds of resumes are read, and many interviews are conducted, but only a chosen few candidates are selected to begin the process of becoming a Windward teacher. Prior to assuming primary teaching responsibilities, Teachers-in-Residence must successfully complete a one to two-year training period. First year Teachers-in-Residence are enrolled in a highly structured Teacher-in-Residence program that provides a balance between coursework, mentoring and practical application.

The goals for Teachers-in-Residence in the program are:

- To learn the mission, values, and culture of the Windward School
- To become knowledgeable about the elements and structure of spoken and written language
- To participate in The Windward Institute workshops and courses
- To develop formal lesson plans and teach lessons that are observed by coordinators and administrator
- To participate in staff development sessions

- To assist the mentor teacher with the classroom program
- To discuss educational/instructional strategies with the mentor teacher

In order to reach these goals, Teachers-in-Residence are enrolled in The Windward Institute core courses: *Multisensory Reading Instruction*, *The Windward Expository Writing Program* and *The Language of Instruction*. These courses reflect the research base of the Windward program and provide a solid foundation of knowledge about language. Teachers-in-Residence are also required to read selected articles from the body of research that supports the Windward program. Before the school year begins, new Teachers-in-Residence attend four days of new faculty orientation designed to familiarize them with the School and its mission and then join the rest of the faculty for additional orientation and training.

Teachers-in-Residence are assigned a mentor teacher with whom they work throughout the year. Mentor teachers also have responsibilities related to the training program that include explaining curriculum and instructional strategies, modeling effective classroom management techniques, providing guidance related to interactions with students, parents and others within the school community, explaining lesson planning and providing explicit feedback on a Teacher-in-Residence's professional growth. Mentor teachers serve as a model by embodying the core values and mission of the school.

The School is committed to providing Teachers-in-Residence with many varied opportunities for professional development, and as such, all new Teachers-in-Residence meet as a group for weekly seminars. Designed to support and encourage new staff members, the seminars address a variety of topics related to Windward's culture, its language arts and content area programs, questioning techniques for classroom use, and lesson planning strategies, the use of technology within the classroom, classroom management strategies, and characteristics of our student population. Staff development sessions for the entire faculty are offered every Friday afternoon. These sessions, designed to improve teaching strategies and keep faculty up-to-date on new research findings. These sessions may include presentations by the School's faculty members or consultants, divisional meetings to address teacher-generated topics, as well as presentations by experts on medications, diversity and behavioral issues. Each campus division has a Teacher-in-Residence Staff Developer whose responsibility is to meet regularly with Teachers-in-Residence and Mentor Teachers to ensure the training program is progressing smoothly. The Staff Developers conduct informal observations of all new Teachers-in-Residence to provide feedback for growth on their progress. Reflection by the Teachers-in-Residence on these observations and input from observers help to improve a Teacher-in-Residence's teaching style and refine teaching techniques. The evaluation of Teachers-in-Residence supports their training and ensures that Teachers-in-Residence are delivering the Windward program as prescribed.

In addition, speech and language pathologists work closely with Teachers-in-Residence to provide instruction in the diagnosis and remediation of students' specific expressive and receptive language deficits. The Director of Language Arts and Instruction, administrators and curriculum coordinators present staff development sessions that are consistent with research-based strategies for delivering effective language-based lessons. Throughout the year, Teachers-in-Residence attend weekly content staff development meetings and are expected to take an active role in these professional discussions.

In addition to Windward Institute courses and workshops, at the end of the year an intensive training program for Teachers-in-Residence is designed and implemented through the Windward Teacher Training Program (WTP). This in-depth, weeklong program is structured to present a consistent message about the School's unique student population and teaching model, with a special emphasis on lesson preparation and delivery of a direct teaching model.

Another WTP designed staff development activity for Teachers-in-Residence is the Windward Practicum. Each August, before the opening of school, selected Windward students are invited to take part in reading, writing and math courses designed to strengthen their skills in these areas. The summer classes are two hours a day and are taught by Windward master teachers and Teachers-in-Residence. Students receive instruction for the first hour and Teachers-in-Residence receive intensive staff development in the multisensory structured language program during the second hour.

To further their professional development, Teachers-in-Residence are encouraged to take part in The Windward School Summer Program. This four-week program for both Windward students and students from other schools consists of classes in math, reading, writing, science, study skills, and organizational skills. Serving in this program allows Teachers-in-Residence the opportunity to observe master teachers delivering selected aspects of the Windward program.

During their second year, Teachers-in-Residence continue in a structured program which includes additional observations, lesson planning, and attendance at advanced Windward Institute courses. Teachers-in-Residence who have exhibited expertise in delivering classroom lessons may be assigned some part-time classroom teaching responsibilities. Administrators and curriculum coordinators continually mentor, coach and observe Teachers-in-Residence during this time.

Being a Windward teacher means that professional development is never completed. The entire teaching staff, including the most senior members of the faculty, is observed by coordinators and administrators and receives ongoing coaching and feedback on daily classroom instruction. It is the expectation that all teachers maintain their knowledge of Windward pedagogy by retaking the core reading, writing, and language courses at The Windward Institute at least every five years; most teachers enroll in The Windward Institute classes every semester. To further support ongoing learning, the WTP maintains a collection of professional books and periodicals that faculty members read to stay current with ongoing research in the field of learning disabilities.

Experienced Windward teachers may choose to pursue an advanced certificate in structured multisensory language by completing a rigorous academic program. This program, which

requires 100 hours of The Windward Institute coursework and a year-long supervised practicum, is nationally accredited by the International Multisensory Structured Language Council (IMSLEC). The Windward Institute is one of five institutions in New York State that has received this accreditation.

Windward is a learning community that supports continuous growth in comprehensive knowledge and skills for all faculty members. This is evidenced in the intensive training and outstanding staff development activities that are created by Windward faculty and administrators, as well as the time and attention that are given to all faculty members to ensure that they develop into and remain knowledgeable and effective teachers. Reporting on the training program at Windward, the evaluator for IMSLEC stated: "Your teacher training program is truly outstanding and could serve as a model for other private schools... The professional preparation program at Windward is outstanding. The bar is set very high!"

The making of a Windward teacher is a well thought-out, demanding, and intensive training program. Teachers-in-Residence are expected to work diligently to acquire the expertise it takes to be a Windward teacher. Teachers-in-Residence quickly learn that teaching is a craft that takes an incredible amount of study, practice, and reflection to perfect. It is the School's mission to develop a faculty that is expert in teaching children with language-based learning disabilities. Windward students deserve nothing less.