By 1993 I had completed twenty-five years of teaching at six different schools, three private and three public. My assignments included regular and special education populations in pre-school, elementary, junior, and senior high schools, and a post high school work program. Clearly, I loved education but just couldn’t find my niche.

Through the generosity of a George Foundation Grant, I was participating in the Neuhaus therapist preparation program, implementing Alphabetic Phonics with high schoolers, and teaching Multisensory Reading and Spelling in Neuhaus adult classes. I was astounded by the coursework and infatuated with truly understanding how someone learns to read. Eureka!

I needed to share this new perspective with other educators. Neuhaus agreed. The Neuhaus board authored a long-range plan. The building at 4433 Bissonnet was under construction. Concern about the state of reading education amplified, triggering growth in attendance in Neuhaus classes. I was in awe working alongside the instructors I had so admired. The collaborative and trustworthy team dedicated to excellence made the work and learning a journey not a job. Each member of the instructional team was a highly knowledgeable professional model willing to help me grow.

Initially, I interacted with scores of secondary teachers attending classes and later observing their teaching. My learning curve evolved when distance learning began. Neuhaus leadership enlarged our vision of school districts and communities where all are readers. The Academic Language Therapy Association accredited Neuhaus courses, and I was certified as a Qualified Instructor. Could a job be any better than this?

For me no other job could be better, but this job did get better. The National Reading Panel Report impacted school districts’ professional development. Neuhaus responded. The teaching staff and the curriculum grew. We stayed true to our mission as we taught well beyond Harris County. The staff camaraderie and resilience made each trip a memorable adventure. Someday we should gather the stories of our days on the road.

In 2006 as Professional Development Director, I had the chance to influence school and district leaders and promote systematic, explicit reading instruction. I learned about management practices. Reading research was exploding. With Neuhaus’ support I completed my master’s degree. The first years of the 21st century shaped the next fifteen years of my professional career.

Each day of teaching, coaching, or mentoring is unique. Neuhaus continuously supports my professional development. Meeting and partnering with incredible leaders and resolute teachers is motivating. Each project Neuhaus takes on teaches me new things about reading instruction and the challenges of change. Each project promotes a deeper understanding of the science of reading, and each has a range of success. I have learned much more, but not enough, about implementation science.

What a joy it has been to guide individuals to become skilled dyslexia therapists! Their impact is infinite. It has been a thrill to bring on amazing Neuhaus team members. Not many educators get to see their students grow from learner to teacher.

For thirty years each workday has been motivating and fulfilling; deeply satisfying. What is happening at Neuhaus now stimulates anticipation of what lies ahead! I literally have fireworks going off in my head as I consider the possibilities.

Mary Lou Slania celebrates 30 years of service at Neuhaus Education Center, a 501(c)(3) non-profit education organization dedicated in promoting Literacy for All. Learn more at neuhaus.org.