

4-1-1982

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Recommended Citation

Ouzts, D. T. (1982). Teacher Personality: Implications for Achievement in Reading. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 22 (3). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol22/iss3/5

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TEACHER PERSONALITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACHIEVEMENT IN READING

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Remedial reading students are unique individuals. They often have poor self-concept and may be frustrated from years of being labeled as underachievers. Often these students become discipline problems and act out their frustrations by assuming the roles of class clown, bully, cool dude, or any one of many character parts which are used to hide feelings of inadequacy. The problems of these students are very real, and the students will use every facade imaginable to cover them up. Typical defense mechanisms include temper tantrums, fighting, flagrant impulsive insults, brooding bouts, and apathy—to cover up feelings of frustration and hopelessness (Mitchell, 1976).

Many reading teachers feel that this sort of student does not want to learn, and they give up on the student because a sad state of hopelessness may have set in. Thus, two individuals are in need of help, the student and the teacher. Can these feelings be sensed by remedial students and actually contribute to lack of achievement in reading? Are there personality characteristics which the teacher should develop which might enhance reading achievement? And, what are the effects of teacher empathy, sincerity, expectation, and classroom atmosphere on the remedial reading student and achievement in reading?

Among the significant people believed to affect children's feelings about themselves are their parents, and, later, their teachers (Davidson and Lang, 1960). The value of a warm, consistent home environment in which parents play a major role cannot be minimized. Motivation is maximized in a stable situation which encourages language and the child's intrinsic motivation to master the environment (Levenstein, 1970).

Teachers, too, should place value in creating warm, consistent remedial reading classrooms so that reading achievement enhancement is not only possible but probable. Classroom climate is increasingly important on the secondary level, where, data suggests, student learning gains are closely related to the general climate of learning that exists. This in turn is linked to such variables as teacher expectation (Good, 1975).

The personality factor of the teacher is an important factor in the type of climate that is established in reading classrooms. Because of the uniqueness of the student who is labeled a remedial reader, the personality of the teacher becomes a major factor to be considered in influencing academic achievement of such a student. Gray said the teacher is the most important factor in promoting progression in reading (1949).

Anyone who has attended school has had a favorite teacher. Perhaps, one liked that teacher because of the content, the class, or simply because of the teacher. There was always something special about that particular teacher. Obviously, there were reasons. Perhaps one of the best ways to describe a good teacher is to consult the students as Hart (1934) did. The purpose of his research was to give ten thousand high school students an opportunity to tell what they liked and disliked about their teachers, that is, what effective teaching was. These students were from sixty-five high schools in all parts of the United States. The students were given an essay type survey in which two teachers were compared, Teacher A and Teacher Z. Teacher A was the best liked teacher, but not necessarily the best teacher. Teacher Z was the least liked. Hart then attempted to find whether Teacher A or Teacher Z was the most effective. If neither Teacher A nor Teacher Z were most effective, the students were to describe how their best teacher differed from A and Z, and call that Teacher H. Samples of the results reported the following in rank order for Teachers A and Z:

Reasons for Liking Teacher A Best

Is helpful with school work, explains lessons and assignments clearly and thoroughly, and uses examples in teaching	Rank 1
Cheerful, happy, good-natured, jolly, has a sense of humor and can take a joke	Rank 2
Human, friendly, companionable, "one of us"	Rank 3
Interested in and understands pupils	Rank 4
Makes work interesting, creates a desire to work, makes classwork a pleasure	Rank 5

Reasons for Liking Teacher Z Least

Too cross, crabby, grouchy, never smiles, nagging, sarcastic, loses temper, "flies off the handle"	Rank 1
Not helpful with school work, does not explain lessons and assignments, not clear, work not planned	Rank 2
Partial, has "pets" or favored students, and "picks on certain pupils"	Rank 3
Superior, aloof, haughty, "snooty", overbearing, does not know you out of class	Rank 4
Mean, unreasonable, "hard boiled", intolerant, ill-mannered, too strict, makes life miserable	Rank 5

From the Hart study one can see that the teacher's personality does affect learning. It is interesting to note that four of the five reasons (80%), as noted above, appear to be affective or traits of personality for both Teachers A and Z. Further results are as follows:

1. Three out of four students liked Teacher A best.
2. One in four students liked Teacher Z best.
3. Four out of five students said that their most liked teacher taught them most effectively.
4. Eighty percent said that Teacher A was their best teacher.

5. One half of one percent said that Teacher Z was their best teacher.
6. Twenty-two percent of the students said neither Teacher A nor Teacher Z, hence, Teacher H was their best teacher. (Hart reported that Teacher H was Teacher A minus many qualities like friendliness, good cheer, companionship, and understanding).

Teacher personality and its effect on student achievement have also been reported by Flanders (1965). Student achievement and attitude scores were significantly higher when teachers were indirect. The indirect teacher is characterized by accepting feelings, praising or encouraging, accepting or using ideas of the students, and asking questions. The direct teacher does more lecturing, giving more orders, and criticizing more.

The contention that teacher personality does affect achievement should not be ignored. Characteristics such as enthusiasm for teaching, accepting students and praising them, as well as having a sense of humor have been reported as causal factors in student achievement. Praise, or the teacher comment, is important in achievement because it aids and informs the students that they are accepted (Good, 1975).

Thus, if teachers do exhibit "give up" and hopeless attitudes, these feelings can be sensed by remedial students and may further contribute to underachievement in reading. Harris (1978) has stated that children know when they are liked and also have an acute awareness of hypocrisy. The teacher who does not like a child usually cannot help. The point is well made that teacher personality is crucial, and that teachers can convey acceptance of students in many ways.

Harris (1977) states that one of the main objectives of the remedial reading teacher should be to develop a relationship with children in which they are not afraid they will be scolded, ridiculed or punished. Teachers who are sarcastic, tense, bothered by interruptions, too serious, and always want to be in control will not be successful in remedial reading classes. If remedial students are not motivated, and they will not be with such teachers, gains in reading achievement will be minimal regardless of the teacher's cognitive abilities.

Whatever the type of reading class or grade level, teacher expectation plays another major role in educating children. One must beware of generalizing or carrying preconceived notions into his or her classroom. An example might be the statement "boys do not achieve as well as girls in reading at the primary level." If a teacher enters a remedial reading class with this expectation, then many children may fail in reading. One may also hear the statement "Title I students are not expected to achieve as well as non-Title students." Again, if teacher expectation (teacher bias?) is a predictor of success, then these children may not achieve success.

Not every teacher is a teacher of reading and not every teacher is able to motivate remedial readers. It takes a special person to motivate these students. The teacher must be enthusiastic, possess patience, be optimistic, sensitive, organized, dedicated, confident, intelligent, and knowledgeable (Harris, 1978).

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