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Linda Mixon Clary
Augusta College

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A SELF-APPRAISAL INVENTORY FOR READING TEACHERS

Linda Mixon Clary

AUGUSTA COLLEGE, GEORGIA

After teaching my first year in a sixth grade class, where the reading levels ranged from 2 to 12, I realized that I needed to know more about teaching reading. I went back to school and learned a lot more. Then, I worked with a federal project that functioned in about a dozen school districts, so I saw lots of teachers—some very good and some awful—and lots of children. I then taught some more myself and decided that kids never get to be better readers without good teachers. But, that meant more training for me. When I went back to school again, I found that many people who knew far more about teaching reading than I did said the same thing—the teacher is the key to successful reading instruction. Research by Wallace Ramsey (1962), Guy Bond and Robert Dykstra (1967), Sterl Artley (1969) and Albert Harris and Coleman Morrison (1969) has indicated that the teacher is the most important variable in reading instruction.

However, at that time and still today, there is not good conclusive research data on the characteristics of good reading teachers. Nevertheless, those of us who have watched good reading teachers and who have tried to be good ourselves often have our own intuitive ideas of what competency in teaching reading involves. The following list, although not mutually exclusive and not in any particular order, contains several traits that many successful reading teachers exhibit. An explanation of each trait and ways that it might be exhibited follow the characteristic itself. The list is intended as a self-analysis. The reader can rate him or herself in column I (always), II (sometimes) or III (never) for each item. Teacher whose students are successfully learning and who are enjoying their job will probably have at least seven answers in column I. Anything less than five answers in I probably signals the need for some help from a supervisor or consultant, further training in reading methods courses, additional reading or participation in staff development work. Careful analysis of the items answered with 2's or 3's may help in formulating personal goals for self-improvement.

Characteristic	Rating		
	Column I Always	Column II Sometimes	Column III Never
1. I am an enthusiastic model of reading.			

Characteristic	Rating		
	Column I Always	Column II Sometimes	Column III Never

Teachers can project to children the idea that they think reading is important and that they spend valuable time engaged in it. Such activities as talking about books that we read and book clubs that we belong to; sharing new books; and devoting time at school to reading things that are not required convey our own beliefs and values.

2. I encourage youngsters as a facet of their learning to read and then becoming sophisticated readers, to learn all aspects of language.

Students need to learn that all the language arts of speaking, listening, reading and writing are important. Beginning readers, regardless of age, must have the opportunity to learn oral language before learning to read written language. Listening activities should be important parts of language arts instruction, and children must learn to talk, listen, read and write proficiently. In other words, they need to learn respect for all aspects of language.

3. I help my students learn what reading is.

Many children define reading as reading a textbook story aloud and completing the accompanying workbook assignment (Johns and Ellis, 1976). As a teacher, do I try to help children find pleasure and usefulness in reading by exposing them to larger varieties of reading materials and helping them relate those materials through all the language arts?

4. I read to my students often and draw attention to reading.

Many good reading teachers appear to be excited about reading and teaching reading. Their reading lessons reflect that excitement! They make reading the center of attention and create that focus through personality, appearance and style. They not only draw attention to reading instruction but also to good literature—by reading aloud to children everyday, telling stories effectively and acting out books.

Characteristic	Rating		
	Column I Always	Column II Sometimes	Column III Never
5. I insist that reading is a “meaning-getting” process.			
<p>There is really little reason to read if the material does not have something to say or if there is no message to be comprehended. This should be true of all materials, however simple, yet we often dwell on how well youngsters say the words. We badger them with decoding skills and make them practice in meaningless materials. Instead we might be most interested in whether or not students obtain meaning when they read and whether or not we help them develop only those decoding skills that they need to help them comprehend.</p>			
6. I spend my reading time actually teaching reading and letting children read.			
<p>Most teachers try to devote a reasonable amount of time to reading instruction each day. However, careful analysis of that period can show that many of the minutes are devoted to correcting behavior, clarifying instruction for children involved in other work, dealing with messengers and other tasks (Porcher, 1974, Tierney, 1974). Actual reading time may be minimal unless the teacher sets up strict ground rules for interruption. Furthermore, students can often spend a lot of their time marking worksheets or completing workbook pages that do not really make them better readers. They may need such time to actually practice reading.</p>			
7. I can teach reading with a basal reader series and/or through other instructional approaches, such as individualized reading or the language experience approach.			

The basal reader approach is the most widely used for teaching reading in our country. In many schools, it is the only way that children are taught to read, even though numerous students have significant problems and need alternative instructional strategies.

Characteristic	Rating		
	Column I Always	Column II Sometimes	Column III Never

Most successful reading teachers can supplement the basal with the language experience and individualized approaches or can adopt these and other means altogether.

8. I am organized.

The most knowledgeable and enthusiastic reading teacher will have difficulty if lessons are not planned, materials are not on hand and time is not budgeted. It takes a lot of out-of-class work to be prepared to teach reading efficiently. In-class time must be spent keeping track of why a certain youngster is having difficulty, what another one already knows, which ones need some changes made, etc. The key to such management is organization.

9. I continue to learn about reading instruction.

The teaching of reading is a rapidly changing and expanding field. Good teachers try to continually keep up and learn about these new findings. Such continuing education may come through reading professional publications, attending conferences, participating in personal exchanges and evaluating new materials.

10. I always create some success for my students and myself.

All children do not learn to read equally well, but each one can meet with some success. That success is generally dependent upon being instructed at an instructional level. Alternate approaches and supplementary materials are sometimes needed. The teacher who teaches children at a level where they can learn and varies approaches and strategies usually achieves some success. No teacher always succeeds equally well with every student, but those who strive to insure the students' success generally feel successful themselves. In that way, the children and teacher are happier.

Here, then, are some ideas on what makes a good reading teacher. They have been gleaned from observing teachers, teaching children and undergraduate and graduate reading teachers, conducting inservice and exchanging ideas with other teacher trainers. Some are based on research, while others are mostly intuition. They are offered here as a source of self-appraisal with their ultimate goal being encouraging those

teachers who exhibit these traits and spurring changes in those who want to improve and change their reading instruction.

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