

7-1-1976

## The Enthusiasm Factor

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### Recommended Citation

VanderMeulen, K. (1976). The Enthusiasm Factor. *Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts*, 16 (4). Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading\\_horizons/vol16/iss4/1](https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol16/iss4/1)

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## THE ENTHUSIASM FACTOR

Not long ago, I was privileged to meet an eighty-six year old lady in a retirement home, who told me she had been a reading teacher. In fact, she had once been a student of William S. Gray. Because enthusiasm about reading is a constant in her life, she is actively engaged in spreading the good news. The reading habits of those around her are being changed for the better, by her habit of carrying a book with her, and talking about it in a “charged-up” manner. Inevitably, someone asks to borrow it. Until she arrived, the library in that retirement home was itself in retirement. Her influence for the cause of reading has revitalized its circulation.

Enthusiasm is an ingredient in the teaching of reading which has not received adequate emphasis comparable to “new” methods and materials being publicized. It is so important that the whole educational process would be hopelessly crippled without it. Yet, in our eagerness to recruit enrollees for training to teach, diagnose, and give corrective help in reading, we may be overlooking a most necessary part of the qualifying test—the positive and energetic drive that comes from enthusiasm. We should make it our business to identify and reward this essential factor. We need also to develop an objective instrument to help screen out candidates who might otherwise become uninspired reading teachers.

There are many dangers inherent in classrooms where teachers who lack emotional interest in reading are working. Having the technical knowledge is only one of the requisites when teaching reading as a means of learning. Studies conducted through the past two decades are replete with evidence that young people are stunted in reading growth, are driven away from using reading for personal satisfaction, and are inclined to perpetuate an attitude of distaste for reading, because teachers failed to convey the excitement of discovery through reading.

It is not known in advance when one will be called upon to expend boundless enthusiastic energy. A prospective teacher seldom recognizes what emotional drain in this work can mean. When one is placed as a reading teacher or specialist, (s)he finds that the statistics of needs and deficiencies are translated into living human beings with accompanying frustrations. They need immediate doses of confidence. Many need splints or protective casts put on their self-concepts. All need gentle, supporting therapy. Other faculty members may be too wrapped up in correcting papers and writing reports to make themselves aware of the serious results that reading problems can cause in the youngsters' lives.

Enthusiasm will spell the difference between demonstrating what can be

accomplished if one has the will, and making a compromise with incompetence. Enthusiasm is the difference between naming the pages to be read, and telling the students where in the chapter to look for the answers to mysteries the whole class has been discussing. Enthusiasm is the difference between succumbing to an attitude of cynicism because it is popular, and trying out new ideas because they come from students and merit attention. Enthusiasm, finally, is the zeal that engenders excitement and activity in a classroom—it is a spirit that can breathe new life into books previously declared dead by the students.

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Editor