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David Hurt

Elnora O. Roane

Earline M. Simms

See next page for additional authors

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Personality Traits Needed by Remedial Reading Teachers

Authors

David Hurt, Elnora O. Roane, Earline M. Simms, and Leo M. Schell

A survey of Kansas reading teachers found that merely meeting the State Department of Education certification requirements is not sufficient to qualify a person to teach remedial reading. Administrators need to consider such personality traits as understanding and tolerance. This study found that remedial reading teachers need an extraordinary amount of patience and optimism.

personality traits needed by remedial reading teachers

David Hurt



Elnora O. Roane



Earline M. Simms



Leo M. Schell

David Hurt is a doctoral candidate in counselor education at Kansas State University. He has worked as a counselor and a coach at high schools and junior highs. As a Ph.D. candidate at Kansas State University he has been an assistant in the Office of Admissions and Records and an assistant to Dr. James McCain, President of the University.

Reading programs for the culturally different is the specialty of Elnora O. Roane, Director of the University Reading Programs and Assistant Professor of Education at Alabama State University. Dr. Roane received her Ph.D. and M.S. degrees from Kansas State University.

An assistant professor in the College of Education at Southern University, Earline Morgan Simms is now a doctoral candidate at Kansas State University. She has taught language arts, speech, and theatre in high schools in Louisiana; coordinated student teacher programs; and taught Headstart Teachers and Adult Basic Education programs.

Leo M. Schell, professor of education in Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University, is director of the Reading Clinic with a particular interest in remedial reading. Dr. Schell has co-edited two books on reading and has published extensively in the major journals in the reading and language arts areas.

What kinds of personality traits are most needed by remedial reading teachers?

To discover how teachers viewed this question, nearly 200 Kansas teachers who were certified under the Kansas State Department of Education as special ("remedial") teachers of reading* were surveyed. For convenience of return, a self-addressed, stamped envelope was enclosed with each questionnaire. Eighty-five teachers responded to the question, "What special personality traits, attributes, or characteristics do you think that teachers who work with youngsters with reading problems need which are not required for typical classroom instruction?" Teachers were instructed to include only personality aspects, not professional knowledge or competencies.

Space on the questionnaire was provided for eight responses, but teachers were clearly told to list as many or as few as they wanted to.

The 85 respondents made a total of 410 statements, an average of five statements per respondent. Each response was read and categorized by three College of Education doctoral students, two of whom were majoring in reading and one in guidance and counseling.

The categories that were established and the number of responses are listed below:

Category Title	Number of Responses
1. Understanding/Acceptance	78
2. Patience	67
3. Flexibility	38
4. Supportive	32
5. Rapport/Friendly	30
6. Creative	27
7. Enthusiastic	22
8. Interest/Concern	21
9. Loving	17
10. Tactful	13
10. Happy	13
11. Trustworthy	8
12. Good Listener	6

* Kansas State Department of Education certification standards, in addition to two years of classroom teaching, require 12 semester hours of graduate course work in reading including a course in diagnosis and treatment and another in clinical practices.

The personality traits needed by remedial teachers were ranked in descending order according to the number of statements made in twelve categories.

These areas were mentioned in 272 items. Moreover, Understanding/Acceptance and Patience accounted for more than one-fourth of the total 410 statements. Each of these two categories was named nearly twice as often as any one of the next four traits.

The responses in each category were studied and statements considered profound, representative, insightful, or impressive were selected for inclusion in this article. These statements are listed below under the categories:

Category I: Understanding and Acceptance

1. "Tolerance and sensitivity of children whose economic, social and language backgrounds are less than ideal. Don't let what you discover about the child, e.g., his parents and their activities or beliefs, prejudice you—even unconsciously—against the child."
2. "Self-acceptance of personal faults and limitations."

Category II: Patience

1. "Endlessly patient in a relaxed atmosphere. Able to recognize success in minute quantities."
2. "Ability to accept failure but not defeat."

Category III: Flexibility

1. "Perhaps a person who is quiet and not so authoritative, which is needed for control of a large classroom, can work happily."
2. "Ability to plan independently for each child's reading development according to his individual need, using a wide variety of techniques and materials. A wide understanding of sequence in learning to read and of expected norms for all age and grade levels."

Category IV: Supportive

1. "Must have a bearing of confidence, humor, enthusiasm and a sense of direction regarding the child's welfare."
2. "Kindness—a touch on the shoulder, a little wink of communication will do wonders in building rapport, and in instilling confidence."

Category V: Creative

1. "Innovative spirit. Willingness to try out new ideas; attempts to create new approaches, uses new and different equipment and materials."
2. "To adapt a variety of materials to suit the needs of several grade levels."

Category VI: Rapport and Friendly

1. "Warm and affectionate—not afraid to show physical affection for the children."
2. "Secure, self-confident for (a) the teacher will not have the "security" of a basal nor often of a teacher's manual, and must not be hesitant to use unorthodox methods and materials; and (b) the teacher must make decisions and must delegate authority to children to enable them to learn responsibility and self-direction."

Category VII: Enthusiastic

1. "Personal enthusiasm for books and reading, and the ability to generate that enthusiasm in others."

Category VIII: Interest/Concern

1. "The teacher must show a genuine interest in each child, therefore she should work with a minimum of students at one time. One person cannot help more than five in a group."

Category IX: Loving

1. "Love of children and love of teaching."

Category X: Tactful

1. "Ability to relate well with all—administrators, faculty, parents, children. Ability to accept constructive criticism as well as to initiate changes. Ability to overcome or ignore personal slights."

Category X: Happy

1. "Be happy and positive, but be honest with students. A sense of humor, a serenity within and without. A happy cheerful disposition—you must learn to laugh at yourself and with children."

Category XI: Trustworthy

1. "A child should be so influenced that he can identify with the teacher."

Category XII: Good Listener

1. "To be able to listen carefully to a child's, teacher's, parent's, or administrator's problems before passing judgment."

DISCUSSION

Not only must the remedial reading teacher be a good teacher of reading who has at his command all of the necessary knowledge of the entire reading process, but he must possess those personal traits that enable him to assume the responsibility of correcting reading problems as well as working with fellow-professionals, and parents. The first five of these are discussed below.

Understanding/Acceptance. If the remedial reading teacher is to help the disabled reader, he has to understand and accept the problems of the pupils with whom he hopes to work. This, in many instances, proves to be a very awesome task because the remedial reading teacher and his pupils usually have so few experiences in common. Yet, as the teacher, he has to understand those factors that are constantly present in the daily lives of his students and how they influence not only the children's school behavior, but their learning as well. As the teacher, he has to understand why the child is always tired, sleepy, irritable, or seemingly "in another world." When he understands that the child is tired or sleepy because he shared with four others a bed designed for two, or that he works at night to supplement the family budget, and that he is possibly irritable because of the constant lack of a balanced diet, and that he often daydreams because this is his device for shutting out all of

the unpleasantness around him, then he adjusts his teaching procedures to circumvent the influences of these factors.

If the remedial reading teacher is to relate to his pupils and to do everything that he possibly can to meet their individual needs, he must do a bit of "soul-searching" and "self-analyzing," for he must recognize his own feelings and attitudes toward working with children whose bodies may be offensive, whose appearances may be less than ideal, whose actions in class may be disruptive, whose language may be non-standard, and whose entire attitude may be negative.

Patience. If success in the remedial reading program could be pre-determined by a "good recipe," patience would certainly be the one ingredient requiring the largest quantity. The remedial reading teacher must realize that the average disabled reader did not become so overnight. In many instances, his problem is an accumulation of failures to acquire specific reading competencies. Thus, the remedial teacher has to take the child where he finds him with respect to reading ability and explore a variety of teaching methods until he finds one or a combination of several that will produce results for the child. In reality then, the remedial reading teacher must "be able to accept failure (time and time again) but not defeat," and he must be able to recognize "success in minute portions."

Flexible. The remedial teacher of reading cannot be one who has developed a comfortable teaching style and is not willing to make a change, for so often many of his students have suffered a fusillade of failures, and what produces results for one of them may not do so for another. Consequently, as the teacher, he has to be a "Jack of all Trades." He should be competent in a plethora of teaching methods and techniques. One observing youngster said, "A thermos keeps things cold and it keeps things hot, and it knows when to which." Like the thermos bottle, the remedial reading teacher must be competent in not only the traditional approaches to teaching reading skills, but he must also know "when to which" programmed instruction, multi-media, both the hardware and the software approaches, or some other method in his search for the best method to be used in remedying reading problems.

Supportive. Many disabled readers have suffered so many failures and have experienced crushing feelings of inadequacies when previous teachers communicated to them their personal feelings of frustration and disgust. Hence, the teacher of remedial reading has to help such children come out of their "shell." To do this successfully, he has to get the children to understand that he and they are going to be part-

ners in the business of learning to read. He will do this through his verbal as well as his non-verbal behavior. Through his facial expressions, the tone of his voice, or that certain kind of look, he will let his students know that he supports them in their efforts. He will make a special effort to sit down and explain the task that has been assigned, and he will give freely any assistance that the child may require.

Rapport/Friendly. The teacher of remedial reading will have that certain personal touch that allows him to convey to his pupils that "I am your friend. I am here to help you, and what is more important, I want to help you." Here, too, the teacher realizes that verbal as well as non-verbal behavior is significant in communicating with children. As a result, voice, facial expressions, and all actions will be directed toward helping children develop a better self-concept, one in which they perceive themselves as human beings, with worth, and who are loved and respected by their teacher. The remedial reading teacher will not hesitate to give any one of the students a great big hug of approval, or a quick touch of approval or encouragement. The teacher develops rapport with the students by reinforcing non-verbal behavior with verbal behavior. He searches and finds some measure of success and achievement in the students' work, and he lets the students know that he is proud of them.

Comments

These eighty-five Kansas reading teachers agree that *understanding/acceptance* was the trait most needed by remedial reading teachers. They considered that tolerance, sensitivity and self-acceptance were more necessary for their success with children than for regular classroom teachers. These teachers also believe that such teachers need an extraordinary amount of patience and optimism.

This data, plus that reported by Klausner (1), clearly indicates that merely meeting State Department of Education certification requirements is insufficient to qualify a person to teach remedial reading. Administrators need to consider personality traits as well as academic qualifications when hiring remedial reading teachers. And teachers who currently teach remedial reading need to carefully assess themselves on each of the 12 categories identified by the respondents of this survey to assure they are teaching children as well as teaching reading.

References

1. Klausner, Dorothy Chenoweth, "Screening and Development of the Remedial Reading Teacher," *Journal of Reading*, 10 (May 1967), pp. 552-559.