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MAIN IDEAS AND IMPORTANT DETAILS

By Ronald Cramer Hal Cafone

Why is creative writing so often low on our list of curricular priorities? It is true that some teachers engage their children in writing activities frequently. But more commonly creative writing is an activity done only once a week or even less frequently. Why?

Part of the reason lies in our lack of awareness of the mutually strengthening relationships that exist between learning to read and learning to write. Other factors being equal the beginning reader who writes frequently has a much better chance of becoming a better reader than does the beginning reader who seldom writes.

There are two essential prerequisites to writing. One, he must be able, however crudely, to form the letters of the alphabet. Two he must be able to make some associations between letters and sounds. If he can do each of these two things he is ready to start creative writing.

Here are some suggestions which will encourage, stimulate and maintain creative writing facility among your students:

1. Remove the constraints typically associated with making students reticent to engage in the writing act. This means that correct spelling, punctuation, red pencilling, marking, and standardized formats will have to be de-emphasized.

2. Encourage pupils to write about things that are relevant to their interests and their needs. It is no good to require children to write to your topic or theme unless that topic or theme is perceived by the child to be

pertinent to his interests and needs. The wise teacher can sometimes arrange matters so that the topics that interest her will also interest many of her students and often it is quite legitimate to arrange matters thus.

3. Provide a host of rich and varied experiences for the children. These experiences need not be of the exotic variety nor of the expensive type either. Successful teachers of writing most often utilize the common environment in an uncommon way to provide topics of interest and relevance for students to write about.

4. Develop sensitivity to good writing by reading poetry and stories. Often times the most appropriate source for this are the poems and stories written by children. Another excellent source is the series written and edited by Bill Martin *Sounds of Language*.

5. Start the writing with a short warm-up period where many children have an opportunity to talk about ideas they have. One nice method is to allow a five minute period wherein every child is asked to write or give orally as many topics as he can think of.

6. Provide a number of ideas for those children who have a difficult time getting started on their own. Give them help and support!

7. Tie the writing in with the entire curriculum.

8. Start a writing center.

9. Write, write, write.

Here are some materials that will help you get started:

Slithery Snakes and Other Aides to Children's Writing: Walter Petty and Mary Bowen, Appleton-Century Crafts

They All Want to Write/Written English in the Elementary School: Alvina T. Burrows, Doris C. Jackson, Dorothy Saunders, Holt, Rinehard and Winston.

Ideas for Stimulating Creative Writing: Ronald L. Cramer, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan 48063 (free).