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Hal Cafone

Ron Cramer

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# Main Ideas and Important Details

by Hal Cafone and Ron Cramer

One of the temptations for the writers of this column is to occasionally write a few sentences about some aspect of language arts instruction. Yielding to this temptation we open this column with a brief homily on the values of creative writing. Why should creative writing interest reading teachers? Writing is the reciprocal of reading. No other language arts skill has a more direct impact upon the extension and refinement of reading ability. This alone would be reason enough, we suspect, to emphasize writing as a logical extension of a well balanced reading program. But creative writing has another equally significant purpose. A good writing program has therapeutic benefits.

One of the general functions of language is to serve as a vehicle for the emotional needs of the normally developing personality. Most commonly these needs are expressed through oral language functions. A baby cries when hungry, frightened or angry. A boy shouts when happy, playful or angry. A young man or woman talks about his love in life. The full range of emotions is expressed in our use of oral language. Writing is merely a case of extending the repertoire of release mechanisms for personality expression. In writing the product becomes permanent. You can look at it carefully, examine it minutely, lay it down and pick it up one year later, compare it with past performance, criticize it severely, admire it grossly. Oral language (unless recorded) has no such permanent quality. It is a funeral. Once the words are spoken they cannot be retracted, revised, or even remembered for very long. Thus while oral language serves the immediate need for emotional release, it does not serve the long range

needs that writing, because of its permanent character, provides. Translating one's experience into written form opens the doorway to the inner self and consequently gives the writer insight into his own personality. This experience, while often pleasant, may sometimes be painful.

Writing serves at least two basic needs of children. First it is a channel for self-expression and secondly, it serves the functional need to communicate our ideas. The latter purpose is widely recognized as a legitimate concern of teachers. The former is widely touted as the legitimate concern of teachers but is less frequently recognized.

We, as reading teachers, seek to foster the development of wholesome personality. Writing can and should become one of the means for developing full and fulfilled personalities. Children can gain, through their writings, a release from anger and tension while at the same time discovering a wellspring of joy and pleasure through writing.

Those of us who attended the IRA Convention in Detroit could not help being amazed, and a little dismayed, at the plethora of materials available to reading teachers. Some of the new textbooks and materials on reading instruction are quite good — a few are excellent. On the other hand, much of what we saw reminded us of what a friend of ours is fond of calling, "Instant Do-It-Yourself Dyslexia Kits." Following are descriptions of a few items that may be of interest:

Holt, Rinehart and Winston has published a revised edition of Bill Martin's *Sounds of Language* series. The illustrations and designs are better than the originals (and they were excellent) and the teachers editions are greatly improved.

Merrill has published the third edition of Arthur Heilman's *Principles and Practices of Teaching Reading*. This is a good general textbook on reading instruction. A useful chapter on, "The Culturally Different Child As a Learner," by Ruby Thompson has been added. Heilman has also co-authored, with Elizabeth Holmes, a handy little book with the intriguing title, *Smuggling Language Into the Teaching of Reading*. The book consists of various types of language activities useful for developing expanded word meanings, critical reading, study skills, intonation and dramatization. Some of the activities are good examples of language activities that should be smuggled out of the classroom but for the most part classroom teachers will find these activities welcome additions to their repertoire of useful language activities for classroom use.

IRA has three recent publications

whose titles are sufficiently trustworthy to enable the reader to determine whether further examination is warranted. They are: *Reading, Children's Books, and Our Pluralistic Society*, Harold Taynzer and Jean Karl, editors; *Some Persistent Questions On Beginning Reading*, Robert Aukerman, editor; *Reading Tests for the Secondary Grades*, William Blanton, Roger Farr and J. Jaap Tuinman, editors. The latter book could be extremely useful for Reading Consultants and Specialists in Secondary Schools since the book contains reviews of fourteen widely used Reading Achievement Tests.

Merrill has published a new book entitled *Dyslexia in the Classroom* by Dale R. Jordan in which the author sketches the "Three Faces of Dyslexia." Somehow when one reads the book the impression is gained that a more apt title would have been the "Three Faces of Ignorance."

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(Ron Cramer and Hal Cafone are on the faculty at Oakland University.)