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## Main Ideas and Important Details

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# MAIN IDEAS AND IMPORTANT DETAILS

by Hal Cafone and Ronald Cramer

If there's anything that raises the blood pressure of reading people to the boiling point in a matter of seconds, it's phonics generalizations and their utility. One section of *Teaching Word Recognition Skills* is completely devoted to this topic, beginning with the famous Clymer study of 1963 and followed by nine other articles that attempt to evaluate some phonic elements and their corresponding generalizations.

This new book, composed of articles from IRA publications and compiled by Mildred Dawson, also deals with other aspects of word recognition such as sight vocabulary, sensory cues, visual discrimination and context clues. Harry Singer's article from the *Handbook for the Volunteer Tutor* entitled "Teaching Word Recognition Skills" is used as an overview to the book and might well be used by school districts and others to introduce their para-professionals and beginning teachers to some principles, sequence, and basic techniques in teaching of word recognition.

Parallel to the continued development of Community Colleges has been the growing need for the development of reading/study skills of junior college students. Many students are given what amounts to another chance at higher education and the development of those skills that make them independent learners. For those interested in the problem, an annotated bibliography by Gene Kerstiens, *Junior Community College Reading/Study Skills* has just been published by IRA.

This bibliography is quite extensive and the reader will find information concerning program prescriptions, descriptions and evaluations as well as sections on methods and materials.

Is reading a basic communications skill that is prerequisite for learning? *Reading and Revolution*, the thirteenth volume in the International Reading Association's Perspectives in Reading Series, entertains this basic question. In addition, the question of the relevance of reading to the social and technological revolution in America is dealt with in two articles. Finally, experimental reading training programs developed by Westinghouse and General Motors are described showing how the teaching of reading is now a concern that goes beyond the traditional limits of the classroom and the classroom teacher.

Bill Martin, Jr., has written and edited a new series of books (what, again?) entitled "Instant Readers" (Holt, Rinehart & Winston).

If you've used Martin's materials before, you know what to expect. These books are excellent. We tried some of them with a two-year-old and a six-year-old! What did they think of them? The six-year-old listened to us read one through twice. The next day she proudly announced, "Dad, did you know I can read?" Well, Dad said he wasn't surprised but he was pleased and asked if he could hear her read the book! Which she did! You should have seen her eyes! The two-year-old loves them, too! Her favorite is "A Ghost Story." The laughter sparkling in her

eyes tell the story more eloquently than words could describe.

These books can make children feel good about themselves — the language patterns of the stories are excellent and the illustrations are the best we've seen in any set of commercial reading materials.

On rare occasions a book on education appears which is both informative and fun to read. *Push Back the Desks* by Albert Cullum (Citation Press) is such a book. This book should be read because it has the capacity both to inspire and enlighten. The book enlightens because Mr. Callum illustrates to us that one can respect, know, and use the basic ingredients of a course of study (history, science, math, grammar) without becoming enslaved to it. Mr. Callum is an unconventional teacher, doing unconventional things in the classroom, who hasn't abandoned the notion that there are still some relevant things to be learned from books.

*Language and Thinking in the Elementary School* by Brooks Smith, Ken Goodman and Robert Meredith has recently been published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston. This book is much more than a language arts

method book, although it functions well in that respect. The authors present what is essentially a synthesis of traditional and modern notions about language, linguistics, and thinking as they apply to teaching and learning in the elementary school. Reading teachers would be well advised to carefully read section five on "Language and Reading." This section is excellent and presents some insights and ideas that represent a fresh and important way of looking at the reading process. The approach is psycholinguistic — but don't let that scare you off, the author believes that "Non, con, fon, don" is just as asinine as "Look, look, look, see Dick run."

*Teach Them All to Read* by S. Allen Cohen (Random House) should provide some interesting reading for those who are devotees of visual perception training as a solution to reading deficiencies. Personally we find his chapters on this topic more suited to the art of witchcraft than to the art of teaching. Nevertheless, since it is traditional to find some redeeming features in any honest effort, we can recommend the first two chapters for your perusal wherein the author thoughtfully considers the problems associated with developing reading programs in urban areas.