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Professional Concerns

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PROFESSIONAL CONCERNS

R. Baird Shuman

EDITOR

Professional Concerns is a regular column devoted to the interchange of ideas among those interested in reading instruction. Send your comments and contributions to the editor. If you have questions about reading that you wish to have answered, the editor will find respondents to answer them. Address correspondence to R. Baird Shuman, Department of Education, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina 27708.

Professional Concerns is a column new to the pages of Reading Horizons. Its purpose is to promote dialogue and an exchange of ideas among those concerned with reading instruction at all levels. Comments about reading instruction are invited. Those who have questions which they would like to have answered by someone uniquely qualified to provide answers are urged to send their questions to the editor who will pass them on to an expert in the field for response.

This column will attempt to treat reading from a broad perspective and to consider it from the standpoint that reading is a skill which cannot be separated from such areas as linguistics, sociology, psychology, and physiology. Contributions that consider the interrelatedness of reading to other fields of research and study will be particularly useful to the readership of the column, as will be suggestions for the training of reading teachers.

Perhaps some readers will wish to share with others ideas about models for teaching reading as one of the language arts, considering, as James Moffett recently has, the appropriateness of some commonly accepted models in use in today's schools:

Let me give you a model of growth. I think we've used for a long time a metaphor or model of language learning, language growth, that probably came from an antiquated, 18th century billiard-ball type of physics, the old Newtonian physics with the particles colliding. This had to be abandoned when they got into relativity and they had to add other dimensions—neutrinos, etc., colliding. Following on the old assemblyline notion, you take the pieces and you make subassemblies. Then the subassemblies are further

assembled; then off plomps the new product at the end of the line. In that sense, the parts add up to the whole—it works with inorganic matter. Now you may feel sometimes that you're working with inorganic matter; the student is utterly inert. However, you're dealing with a biological person; they're ert; and you need an organic language learning to go with that.

I draw my model from the embryo. You've all seen books with a series of drawings or photos of the embryo or fetus at different stages; at a few weeks, a few months; and they show it growing from a single cell. Just fertilized, it's a simple circle; then the circle begins to change shape slightly into the fetal position. Then the fetus gets more complicated. You begin to see gradually the limbs, the head, the neck, and the organs and veins, the pulmonary and vascular systems. The point is that it's never anything less than a whole, no matter which drawing or photograph, no matter which stage you take the photo of. You never see a part; it's always a whole. This is the thing about organic growth—it's not pieces put together; they don't add up like that.

From James Moffett, "On Language,"
North Carolina English Teacher, 33
(Winter 1976), pp. 11-12. Quoted
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