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Editorial Comment

GESTALT THEORY AND READING

Reading can be defined as a purposeful process of identifying, interpreting, and evaluating symbols, words, and ideas in terms of the experiential background of the reader. Without mental content resulting from experience, symbols, words, and ideas are meaningless. Gestalt theory can explain reading as a unified process in which every part-activity such as identifying, interpreting, and evaluating lose their identity and go together to form a new whole much as two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen go together to form water.

Perception, a term widely used by therapists and reading specialists, is, according to Gestalt theory, an act of the total organism which results from excitation of sensory receptors and interpretation in terms of the experiential background of the organism. It is unique and personal in nature and involves integration of previously understood "parts" into new "wholes." This integration is creative and, like a watch, is more than the accumulation of "parts."

Gestalt theory is helpful in the remediation of individuals who have difficulty in the perception of form and direction. It aids the therapist in the treatment of children who are unable to associate meaning with printed symbols. Knowledge of Gestalt theory can aid the teacher and therapist in focusing their attention upon the "whole" individual in his environment as he, in a goal oriented process, attempts to make effective use of his books. Furthermore, therapists will be more apt to understand how interest and emotional states are resultants of experiential background. Knowledge of Gestalt theory can determine not only how reading will be explained but how it can be taught.

Homer L. J. Carter

Editor