Professional Concerns

R. Baird Shuman
Duke University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons
Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons: A Journal of Literacy and Language Arts by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
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.