DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 062 CS 213 144

AUTHOR Hynds, Susan
TITLE Thinking about Characters and Thinking about People: Social Cognition, Literary Response, and Character Attribution Processes among Young Adult Readers.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 47p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Boston, MA, April 15-21, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Characterization; *Cognitive Processes; *Cognitive Structures; *Cognitive Style; Higher Education; Literature Appreciation; *Reader Response; Reading Research; Undergraduate Students; Young Adults
IDENTIFIERS *Cognitive Complexity; *Literary Response

ABSTRACT

A study compared the literary response and character attribution processes of 40 undergraduate students on the basis of differences in their interpersonal construct repertoire, or "interpersonal cognitive complexity." No studies to date have explored the ways in which cognitive complexity influences readers' overall responses to literature or the "types" of attributions that readers of high and low complexity are likely to make about literary characters. Informants were asked to complete a measure of cognitive complexity, to read a short story, and to respond in writing to two questions at four separate junctures in the story: "What is your overall response?" and "Why do you suppose the main character behaved as he did?" Analyses of written protocols indicated that cognitive complexity is more associated with the ways in which readers make inferences in search of meaning than with their literal/descriptive responses, personal associations, or engagement. Attributions which frame characters' personality traits in the context of temporal psychological states and external influences appear to characterize this search for meaning. The findings and analytic framework generated by the study are useful for researchers and practitioners interested in identifying and understanding readers' literary response and character attribution processes from a social-cognitive perspective. (Three tables of data are included; 48 references are attached.) (Author)

Thinking About Characters and Thinking About People: Social Cognition, Literary Response, and Character Attribution Processes among Young Adult Readers

Susan Hynds, Ph.D.

paper delivered at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association

Boston, Massachussetts
April, 1990

Thinking About Characters and Thinking About People:

Social Cognition, Literary Response, and

Character Attribution Processes among Young Adult Readers

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to compare the literary response and character attribution processes of forty undergraduate students on the basis of differences in their interpersonal construct repertoire, or "interpersonal cognitive complexity." No studies to date have explored the ways in which cognitive complexity influences readers' overall responses to literature or the types of attributions that readers of high and low complexity are likely to make about literary characters. Informants were asked to complete a measure of cognitive complexity, to read a short story, and to respond in writing to two questions at four separate junctures in the story: "What is your overall response?" and "Why do you suppose the main character behaved as he did?" Analyses of written protocols indicated that cognitive complexity is more associated with the ways in which readers make inferences in search of meaning than with their literal/descriptive responses, personal associations, or engagement. Attributions which frame characters' personality traits in the context of temporal psychological states and external influences appear to characterize this search for meaning. The findings and the analytic framework generated by this study are useful for researchers and practitioners interested in identifying and understanding readers' literary response and character attribution processes from a social-cognitive perspective.

Thinking About Characters and Thinking About People: Social Cognition, Literary Response, and Character Attribution Processes among Young Adult Readers

Introduction

To date, several theoretical frameworks have been developed for conceptualizing how readers understand and remember stories (Johnson and Mandler, 1980; Mandler and Johnson, 1977; Rumelhart, 1977; Rumelhart and Ortony, 1977; Schank and Abelson, 1977; Stein, 1979; Stein and Glenn, 1979). Recent research from a social-cognitve perspective, has begun to conceptualize reading as a socially-situated and embedded process (Bruce, 1981; Freedle, Naus & Schwartz, 1977, Grueneich and Trabasso, 1981, Hynds, in press), in which readers develop "social logic" (Black, Galambos, and Read, 1984) or the understanding of social situations necessary for comprehending stories. Beyond this fundamental compentency, readers also develop what Purves (1986) describes as a knowledge of a particular culture's "rules, its rituals, its mores, its heroes, gods and demigods (p. 2)."

Related to the development of these social and cultural understandings, readers learn to make "character attributions," or inferences about why story characters behave as they do (see Grueneich and Trabasso, 1981 for a review of research on character attribution processes in children).

A variety of studies on character attribution processes have explored reader variables and text characteristics related to story comprehension and recall. Bower (1978) proposed that understanding and remembering characters' actions is similar to the processes involved in actual person perception. Characters' actions are understood as a product of particular goals they wish to achieve. Therefore, texts with incomplete information of characters' goals and plans result in poor recall and understanding. Bower also argued that

character motives are important organizers for subsequent interpretations of stories, and that readers' viewpoints with regard to characters influence their interpretation of those characters' acts.

Similarly, Omanson, Warren, and Trabasso (1978) demonstrated that children made more sophisticated inferences when motivational information was included in a story than when such information was not included. More recently, in a study of third grade children, Sundbye (1987) found that creating more explicit texts enhanced story understanding, and that questioning readers about the story goal structure during the reading produced more and better inferences.

In a study of readers' knowledge sources in determining characters' goals, Goldman (1982) reported that when children from 1st to 7th grade were asked to make up simple stories, they appeared to rely on three sources of knowledge: a) the protagonist's states and actions b) the role of other people c) the role of the environment. Further, she discovered that children develop the ability to make goal inferences in concrete interpersonal situations (getting a dog) earlier than they develop this ability in abstract situations (wanting or not wanting to be friendly).

In a study of grade school children and adults, Jose (1988) found that readers' ratings of the importance of the protagonist's goal and the difficulty of the protagonist's experiences in attaining the goal increased the ratings of "storyhood" and story liking. He concluded that adults attend to goal importance information in judging story liking to a greater extent than do children.

Lehr (1988) found a strong link between young children's ability to understand character motivations and their ability to generate themes in reference to stories. In this study, children who could not take character perspectives often gave responses that were not congruent with the events in

the text. Furthermore, very young children saw characters' acts and texts as fixed, while older children began to question what they did not like.

Thus, previous research from a reading comprehension or a text grammar framework has demonstrated that texts with explicit goals lend themselves to greater reader comprhension. In learning to impute characters' goals, readers rely on knowledge about protagonists' internal psychological states, relations with others, and external situations. The ability to make such inferences relates to readers' ability to speculate about thematic aspects of stories.

For the most part, however, research from a reading comprehension perspective relies on tests of comprehension and recall, as well as experimenter-created texts in studying character attribution processes. Such studies have not used actual literary texts, and have not focused on factors of engagement or personal evaluations, along with factors of comprehension and recall.

Only a few studies have focused on character attribution processes in literary reading. Beach (1983) has argued that readers' definitions and explanations of literary characters' acts involve knowledge of both social and literary conventions. He proposed that readers initially evaluate a character's acts as positive or negative, then may or may not attempt to explain the character's acts in terms of goals, strategies, and so forth. Furthermore, as readers move from secondary school to college, they learn to explain characters' acts in terms of long-term goals as opposed to immediate perspectives and physical needs (Beach & Wendler, 1987).

As part of the character attribution process, readers must also develop the ability to distinguish their own perceptions from those of story characters. With increasing age and schooling, young children demonstrate a tendency toward stronger relationships between perceived similarity to story

characters and factors of reader identification and suspense (Jose & Brewer, 1984). In and beyond secondary school, however, readers begin to dissociate their own self concepts from their perceptions of literary characters (Beach & Brunetti, 1976).

Thus, in literary reading, readers must develop a knowledge of social, cultural, and story conventions, as well as the ability understand and distinguish characters' acts and beliefs from their own. However, while research has begun to explore the character attribution processes which operate in reading, few studies have investigated the particular social-cognitive competencies which underlie these attribution processes. Furthermore, very little is known about how such social cognitive attributes might relate to response processes beyond the comprehension and recall of stories.

Interpersonal Cognitive Complexity and Literary Reading

*George Kelly's **Personal Construct Psychology** (1955) provides a useful framework for investigating the social-cognitive dimensions of readers' character attribution processes. Kelly argues that people conceptualize others in their social world by means of "interpersonal constructs," or bipolar reference axes (i.e., "good-bad," "godly-ungodly"). "Interpersonal cognitive complexity" (Crockett, 1965) (an assessment of the numbers of personal constructs in an individual's construct repertoire) has been related in several previous studies to sophisticated communicative and interpretive functioning in the social realm (see O'Keefe and Sypher, 1981). Interestingly, interpersonal cognitive complexity has not been related to general intelligence or verbal fluency within normal ranges of intellectual functioning (Burleson, Applegate, & Neuwirth, 1981; Crockett, 1965; Delia and Crockett, 1973; Hale, 1980; Mayo & Crockett, 1964; Scarlett, Press & Crockett, 1971). Although there is a very low correlation between cognitive complexity and general verbal abilties among*

children below the third grade, Burleson, Applegate & Neuwirth (1981) argue that such an association "is specific to the childhood years, and probably disappears in later years as portions of the individual's construct system become differentially elaborated" (p. 221). Thus, as Crockett (1965) has argued, individuals may be "bright in school but stupid in interpersonal relations" (p. 55).

Only recently has cognitive complexity been related to social cognitive and interpretive processes in the fictional realm. In Hynds' (1985) study of adolescent readers, cognitive complexity was associated with greater inferential story comprehension, interest in the actions and motivations of people within and outside a story, and comparisons of the story with others. In a later study, Hynds (1989) found that some adolescent readers were inconsistent in their tendencies to employ interpersonal constructs in their reading, refusing to analyze what they did not like, or "diving off" the text into their own personal reveries or associations. Other readers refrained from bringing social competencies to reading because they were afraid of appearing wrong in front of a "teacher-expert." Still others appeared to possess the competence and the volition to make sophisticated character attributions, but lacked the pragmatic understandings necessary to demonstrate these competencies in their written work or in class discussions.

While cognitive complexity has been related to story comprehension and character attribution processes in general, little evidence is available to indicate the specific ways in which cognitive complexity relates to readers' overall response and character attribution processes. Some more specific questions can be posed in light of what little research exists on cognitive complexity in the fictional realm.

Questions About Cognitive Complexity and Literary Reading

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the focus and meaning sources of readers' responses--specifically the degree to which readers vacillate along a continuum of reader and text during the reading transaction (Applebee, 1973; Flynn, 1983; Galda, 1983; Garrison & Hynds, 1989; Golden & Guthrie, 1986; MacLean, 1986). While readers typically move back and forth along this continuum as they read a variety of literary texts (Garrison & Hynds, 1989), some readings appear more associated with reader-focused responses such as personal associations and evaluations, while others are more text-focused, concentrating on aspects of the text's meaning or the author's technique. The question arises as to whether differences in cognitive complexity will be most noticeable in terms of readers' observations about the literary text, or whether they will manifest themselves in more personal reader-focused responses. Hynds (1985) found no significant relationship between cognitive complexity and reader-focused responses. However, her response measure asked informants to choose one of twenty pre-coded questions that might be asked about a literary work (Purves, 1973); her study did not elicit more open-ended responses from informants. Perhaps if readers had been able to respond in their own words to the entire story, rather than choosing from pre-selected questions, different results would have emerged.

The question also arises as to what specific types of text-focused response readers are likely to make. That is, will differences on the basis of cognitive complexity be associated primarily with readers' interpretations of a literary text, or will they be associated with more literal responses as well? Hynds (1985) found that cognitive complexity related to inferential, but not literal story comprehension, based upon readers' scores on standardized story comprehension tests. Informants were not asked to give open-ended responses to

a story as a whole. Thus, it seems useful to ask whether interpersonal cognitive complexity will be associated with literal, rather than interpretive responses, when informants have an entire range of possible responses from which to choose. Finally, presuming that cognitive complexity is more associated with inferences than literal story responses, research is needed to explore whether differences in interpretive processes on the basis of cognitive complexity will be more associated with inferences about literary characters or about other aspects of the story as a whole.

There are also some unexplored questions about the specific types of character attribution processes associated with interpersonal cognitive complexity. Previous work has defined cognitive complexity as the propensity to consider internal, as opposed to external, characteristics in people. Thus, researchers have found only very scant relationships between cognitive complexity and the ability to make descriptive or external observations about others in the social world (Burleson, Applegate, & Neuwirth, 1981; Hale, 1980). In the realm of literary fiction, Hynds (1985) found no relationship between complexity for peers or characters and numbers of descriptive attributes in written character impressions. Readers in this study, however, were asked to describe particular characters in such a way that a stranger would know what kind of people those characters were from informants' descriptions. The subjects in this study were not asked specifically to speculate on the causes and motivations behind a particular character's behavior.

It would be interesting to see whether interpersonal cognitive complexity predisposes readers away from what Beach and Wendler (1987), citing Peel (1971), have called "describer thinking" and toward a search for the internal and enduring traits of others. Beyond this question, however, being able to conceptualize people in terms of internal traits is only one aspect of social

cognition. It seems important to investigate how readers use psychological traits and states in their interpretive processes--that is, how readers use temporal states in order to explain characters' more enduring psychological attributes. Such an investigation will shed more light on the character attribution process in general, and the role of cognitive complexity in this process, in particular.

Finally, considering Hynds' (1985, 1989) earlier findings that readers did not always bring the full range of their personal constructs to literary texts, it is useful to explore whether cognitive complexity might be one attribute that predisposes readers toward character analytic processes as an automatic part of reading. A comparison of readers' responses when they are asked for their "overall response," as opposed to when they are specifically asked to speculate on character motivations, could reveal some important information about this question.

In light of the foregoing issues, this study was based upon the following research questions:

1. *Will high complexity and low complexity readers differ with regard to these aspects of their <u>overall story response</u>:*
    a. *the overall focus of their responses (reader, text)*
    b. *the literal or interpretive dimensions of their response*
    c. *the focus of readers' interpretations (story, character)*
2. *Will high and low complexity readers differ with regard to these aspects of their <u>character attribution</u> processes:*
    a. *internal versus external attributions*
    b. *specific types of internal attributions (traits, psychological states)*

3. Will high and low complexity readers differ in their character attribution processes when asked for their "overall response" as opposed to when specifically asked to speculate about "character motivations?"

Method

Subjects and Data Collection

Forty undergraduate students enrolled in introductory speech communication classes at a private southern university participated in the study. Data were collected in two class sessions approximately two weeks apart.

Day one. All students were asked to complete the "two-peer version of Crockett's (1965) Role Category Questionnaire (RCQ). The instrument asked students to describe, in a free response format, a liked and a disliked peer. Students were given five minutes to write each impression. These RCQs were later coded for numbers of interpersonal constructs in each impression.

*Day Two. All students were asked to read "This is My Living Room" (McAffee, 1966). The story is a first person narrative about a bigoted man whose actions violate traditional expectations about how people are supposed to behave (i.e., he murders a black man and goes unpunished, blackmails the local sheriff, and reveals the existence of his mistress to the reader while he is in bed with his wife). Readers were stopped at four separate junctures in the text and asked to respond to the following questions (3 minutes each question, per juncture): (a) **Overall Response Impression:** Students answered the question "At this point in the story, what is your overall response?" (b) **Character Motivation Impression:** Students responded to the question "Why do you suppose the main character behaved as he did?"*

Because this study's data collection procedures (stopping readers at four separate junctures and asking them to respond to written prompts) were fairly time-consuming and potentially taxing, readers were not asked to respond to

several different stories in several sittings. Although focusing the study on one story is a potential limitation, it was deemed preferable to presenting several texts and asking for more short-answer or closed-ended responses at the conclusion of each reading. Furthermore, Beach and Hynds (in press) have noted the limitations of retrospective (as opposed to in-process) accounts of response, in that the former "may not represent immediate response processes . . . and may be influenced by differences in memory, reasoning ability, or writing ability (p. 39)." Thus, the benefits of an open-ended on-line method of response, as opposed to a retrospective method, appeared to outweigh the limitation of drawing conclusions on the basis of one reading and one story. Considering this limitation, however, it was important to select a story that would be evocative enough to provide a variety of possible avenues for response and interpretation.

"This is My Living Room" was selected as the focal story for several reasons. First, it was representative of the kind of story that young adults might read on the undergraduate level. Second, the story could potentially evoke a variety of responses--affective and personal as well as cognitive and textual. Because the story violated typical story structure (where the negative protagonist is punished in the end), readers could have commented about aspects of the text, including the author's techn ique. Because it involved issues such as racism, sexism, and criminal behavior, readers might have responded on a highly reader-bound, emotional level. Since it was set in the rural South, these students in a Southern university might have brought some of their autobiographical or personal associations to the reading. Finally, because it was a first person narrative, readers would have to rely on their own character attribution processes in explaining the behaviors of the

protagonist, rather than recalling information directly presented about the narrator in the text.

Further studies involving a variety of texts will no doubt shed more light on the role of interpersonal cognitive complexity in reading. However, considering the richness and the brcad range of potential responses that might be evoked by this literary text, it was deemed appropriate to compare the responses high and low complexity readers on the basis of this one reading experience.

Coding of Role Category Questionnaires

The Role Category Questionnaires (RCQs) were coded by the researcher according to the procedure outlined by Crockett, Press, Delia, and Kenny (1974). Interpersonal Cognitive Complexity was determined by averaging the number of psychological attributes mentioned by students for the liked and the disliked peer. A subsample of 20 questionnaires was coded by a second rater. Inter-rater reliability by pearson correlation was .93.

Analyses

Since this is an exploratory study, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in order to uncover categories of literary response and character attribution in the responses of informants. In order to explore research question one ("overall response"), readers of high and low complexity were compared on: (a) responses invoked by the text versus responses invoked by the reader (b) literal responses versus interpretive responses (c) inferences about the story versus inferences about characters.

In order to explore research question two ("character attribution"), readers of high and low complexity were compared on: (a) external inferences about the character (i.e., background) versus internal inferences (i.e., traits, psychological states) (b) the two overriding types of internal

inferences--(1) psychological traits (i.e., "mean, cruel") versus (2) psychological states (i.e., "he feels sympathy").

Finally, in response to question three (whether cognitive complexity predisposes readers toward character attribution as an automatic part of reading), the two overriding categories of readers' responses (traits, states) were compared across two separate story impressions--one where they were asked for their "overall response," and one where they were specifically asked to speculate on character motivations.

Initially, a content analysis method was used to identify the specific types of overall responses and character motivations revealed in the impressions. After preliminary categories were established, the impressions were analyzed again by the researcher to determine approximate occurrences of response in each of the categories. When categories failed to yield a sufficient number of responses, they were subsumed into larger categories. The resulting categories are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Once the content analysis system had been completed, two independent raters, unfamiliar with the cognitive complexity ratings of particular readers, coded the impressions for numbers of responses by category. Scores for individual readers on each category of response were determined by averaging the scores of the two raters. Due to the complex nature of the response categories, one statement or T-unit might typically represent several instances of a particular response (i.e., one statement such as "He is mean, domineering, and cruel" would count as 3 "Character Traits"). Thus, protocols were not

segmented into pre-determined idea units. Raters were instructed to judge whether a single statement contained multiple instances of response.

Inter-rater reliabilities were determined on a subsample of 20 protocols. Reliabilities by pearson correlation for the six overriding categories (Text-focused responses, Reader-focused responses, Motivations, Motivational Referents, and Tangential responses in impressions 1 and 2) averaged .85, ranging from .97 for Text-invoked responses to .79 for Motivational Referents. Agreement on the remaining 12 lower level categories averaged .89, with 58% of the ratings in the 90-100% range, 33% in the 80-90% range, and only one category in the 60-70% range.

Once the protocols had been coded, readers were separated into "high" (n=18) and "low" (n=22) interpersonal cognitive complexity groups by means of their scores on the RCQs. Analyses of variance were then conducted to determine specific sources of variance in response type among high and low complexity readers.

Overriding categories of response

In keeping with the study's questions, three main categories of response were identified in the first impression ("What is your overall response to the story?"). Specific descriptions of these categories follow.

Text-focused responses. These represent the reader's attempt to understand, make inferences about, or classify a text. Although these descriptions or inferences often bear the personal stamp of individual readers, they appear to be invoked initially by concerns about the text, and reflect the reader's attempt to discover what the story means, how the story works, or why the characters behave as they do. Such responses include: literal descriptions of the story or character (i.e., "It's about a southern family.")

or more inferential statements (i.e., "It's about man's inhumanity," "He thinks others are out to get him.").

Reader-focused responses. These involve the reader's engagement, disengagement, or personal evaluations, rather than an attempt to understand or interpret the work. Such responses appear to be invoked initially by personal feelings, attitudes, or beliefs of the reader and include: personal evaluations of the story or characters (i.e., "this is an awful story, an interesting story."), engagement responses (i.e., "I'm excited, saddened, etc."), or disengagement (i.e., "I'm bored, sleepy, etc.").

Tangential responses. These represent the reader's reflection on issues beyond the immediate transaction between reader and text. In these responses, readers appear to step momentarily outside of the text world in order to reflect on uncertainties, comment on their own response processes, or think about personal experiences peripheral to the reading. Such reflections can include: questions (i.e., ""Who is Ezmo?"); statements which acknowledge reiteration from one story juncture to the next (i.e., "My response is basically the same."); and personal tangents which typically represent an attempt to rewrite the text (i.e., "The ending should have been more positive and upbeat") or reflect the reader's personal circumstances (i.e., this reminds me of a time when...").

Overriding Categories of Character Attribution

Responses in impression two ("Why do you suppose the main character behaved as he did?") fell into three categories. Descriptions of these categories follow.

Motivations. These responses include attributions about the character's behaviors and beliefs--those described specifically in the text and those inferred by the reader. Motivations can include those external to the

character (attributions about his social context, background, or behaviors [i.e., "He probably grew up in a backwards southern environment."]), and those internal to the character (attributions about his traits [i.e., "He is cold and domineering"] and psychological states [i.e., "He feels angry."])

Motivational Referents. These responses include specific actions, beliefs, personality attributes from which the reader infers motivations or causes. They can include behaviors (i.e., "He kills old Ezmo because..."), traits (i.e., "He is a bigot because..."), psychological states (i.e., "He thinks the world is out to get him because..."), and situations, (i.e., "he is not caught by the sheriff because...")

Tangential Responses. See previous description.

Results

The Role of Interpersonal Cognitive Complexity in Readers' Overall Story Response Processes

The relationship between readers' overall story responses and cognitive complexity were investigated by means of a series of split-plot factorial analyses of variance, with peer complexity group as the between subjects factor and response type as the within subjects factor. Initial analyses were performed on overriding categories of response. When significant interactions occurred, subsequent analyses of variance were performed on subordinate categories, in order to determine specific sources of variation between high and low complexity readers. Means and standard deviations of readers on all categories of response are reported in Table 2.

Insert table 2 about here

The focus of readers' responses. A comparison of high and low complexity readers on text- focused *versus reader-* focused *responses revealed a significant main effect for peer complexity group, F (1,38) = 9.31, p < .01, as well as a significant interaction, F (1,38) = 5.23 ,p < .05. A look at group means reveals a noticeable tendency among high complexity readers toward larger numbers of text-* focused *responses. No marked differences occurred in the area of reader-* focused *responses, indicating that cognitive complexity had a negligible influence on readers' personal evaluations, engagement, or disengagement from the story. It appears in this study, then, that cognitive complexity is more closely associated with the ways in which readers understand, classify, and interpret the text, rather than more personal, affective responses.*

The literal or interpretive dimensions of readers' responses. Comparisons of literal and interpretive responses among high and low complexity readers reveal a significant main effect for peer complexity group F (1,38) = 9.43 ,p < .01, and a significant interaction F (1,38) = 6.32, p < .01. Although high complexity readers made slightly more literal responses than low complexity readers, the most marked difference occurred in the area of interpretive responses. Thus, in this study cognitive complexity appears to be more closely associated with making interpretations or inferences than with more literal descriptions of the text. This finding corroborates an earlier finding by Hynds (1985) where cognitive complexity was associated with inferential, but not literal story comprehension among adolescent readers. More generally, this finding lends further support to the notion than cognitive complexity is not associated with general intelligence or academic aptitude, but is specific to interpretive functioning in the interpersonal realm. More specifically, in the realm of fiction, where readers must frequently assess and interpret the

behavior of others, cognitive complexity would appear to underly readers' abilities to make inferences about stories, but not necessarily their literal descriptions or observations.

The focus of readers' interpretations. When high and low complexity readers were compared on numbers of story inferences versus numbers of character inferences there was a significant main effect for peer complexity group, $F(1,38) = 8.61$, $p < .01$, and a significant interaction $F(1,38) = 6.32$, $p < .01$. A closer look reveals that high complexity readers did not differ from low complexity readers in numbers of inferences about the story in general. The most marked differences were, predictably, in the area of character inferences. While cognitive complexity in the fictional realm appears to be an attribute which underlies story comprehension, if readers'responses to this particular story are representative of response processes in general, cognitive complexity appears to be more connected to inferences about characters than to inferences about more general aspects of the story (i.e., formal structure, thematic interpretation).

Thus, while cognitive complexity obviously underlies the reading process, it seems more closely associated with the ways in which readers make meaning of a text than with their personal asscciations or engagement. Further, it appears that cognitive complexity is not connected to readers' attempts to recall, describe, or classify a text, but is more associated with inferences which emanate from an understanding of motivations, circumstances, and psychological states of characters.

The Role of Interpersonal Cognitive Complexity in Readers' Character Attribution Processes

The relationship between readers' character attribution processes and cognitive complexity was investigated by means of analyses on categories of

attribution in both story impressions.

Attributions about internal versus external states. Comparisons of high and low complexity readers on numbers of character internal states versus external states reveals a significant main effect for peer complexity group, F (1,38) = 7.74, p < .01, but no significant interaction. A look at group means reveals that both in numbers of character internal inferences, and character external inferences, high complexity readers scored higher than low complexity readers. Thus, cognitive complexity appears to predispose readers to not only search for internal traits, states, and motivations of characters, but to speculate on external influences on their behaviors and attitudes as well.

Specific types of internal attributions. Additional analyses of specific internal states were conducted in order to determine what types of such inferences accounted for variance between high and low complexity readers. When high and low complexity readers were compared on numbers of psychological traits and psychological states, there was a significant main effect for peer complexity group, F (1,38) = 3.94, p < .05, and a significant interaction F (1,38) = 7.19, p < .01. A closer look revealed that this interaction was due to the tendency of high complexity readers to make more inferences than low complexity readers about characters' immediate psychological states. No noticeable differences occurred in the area of character traits.

The finding that high complexity readers differed from low complexity readers on numbers of attributions about characters' immediate psychological states rather than numbers of character traits may suggest a possible tendency among high complexity readers to mention, then search beyond such generic traits for underlying feelings, attitudes, or motivations. A more qualitative look at individual response protocols reveals specific ways in which high and

low complexity readers use attributions about character traits and states in forming character impressions.

How Readers Use Psychological Traits and States in Character Attribution Processes

Traits as organizing principles. It appears from qualitative analyses of individual protocols that high complexity readers often use generalized character traits as explanations or "organizing principles" for other traits and psychological states. One high complexity reader, for example, says:

(1) *This man will stick up for his family when push comes to shove (he doesn't want somebody calling his girl a liar and he really values his wife over the whore). But under the auspices of protecting them, he is fighting a real inner problem. He forces people to do everything; to look at the dead man, to work, to have sex, not to have sex, etc. This feeling of authority is what he craves.*

Similarly, the high complexity reader in the following excerpt responds to the question of why the main character behaved as he did by framing the character's enduring attributes (egocentrism, ignorance) in the context of related behaviors and psychological states.

(2) *Juncture one: Perhaps his family life was not so great. He takes a lot of anxiety out on his family (physically striking his wife.) Or perhaps he just doesn't understand why young girls want to wear make up and go out with boys. He could feel threatened by the boys. He is egocentric and wants everything his way.*

Juncture two: His ignorance and lack of understanding force him to be selfish. He doesn't understand there is life and happiness anywhere. he must be unhappy, and inflicts his miseries on his family. He is confused.

As this excerpt demonstrates, this high complexity reader begins by searching for an situational explanation of the character's behavior ("his family life was not so great"), then uses the character's feelings and attitudes to further explain what happened in the story (i.e., the character is anxious, doesn't understand, feels threatened by boys, etc.). In the second juncture, the reader continues to demonstrate how the character's basic ignorance and confusion underlies his selfishness and brutal behavior.

Traits as stereotypes. While high complexity readers in this study tended to cite psychological traits as organizing principles to explain characters' behaviors and beliefs, low complexity readers, by contrast, tended to either list a string of traits, with little attempt to organize them into whole impressions, move toward a monolithic impression, dominated by one overriding trait, or begin with one overriding trait, then gradually abandon the text.

One low complexity reader, for instance, says of the main character: "He's such a racist, chauvinistic, self-righteous loser." Another says, "I'm really beginning to become offended by this blatant ignoranced (sic) bitterness, and self-righteousness displayed by the main character." Still another describes the main character as "an individualistic, old fashioned pioneer."

While the listing of character traits is certainly not an indication of stereotyping, it is important to note that low complexity readers seldom moved beyond these lists of traits to elaborate upon them in the context of other traits or psychological states. Nor did low complexity readers often present or speculate upon seeming contradictions in the main character's behavior or beliefs. More typically, low complexity readers began their impressions with one overriding trait, then shaped their subsequent responses around that trait, seldom incorporating new information revealed by the story. Notice, for example, how the trait of "close-mindedness" dominates this low complexity

reader's unfolding impression:

(3) *juncture one: ...He seems to be a very close minded individual who thinks he is right all the time. He reminds me of an Archie Bunker from Tenn. or some backward place.... He seems to be a very close minded individual.*

juncture two: My first opinion of the man is the same as before-except intensified--he feels that he is the most important person around and everyone else is there to please him...

juncture three: My thoughts about the man are becoming clearer and clearer to the fact that he is super close-minded and very much like Archie Bunker...

juncture four: The man really has no concern for anyone but himself. He believes he is right in everything and even killing. He has proved to be just as I thought he would be or even worse.

This "monolithic" construing is also evident in the following response by a low complexity reader. Notice how this reader is gradually distracted from the reading experience by his mounting irritation over what he sees as the main character's prejudiced attitude. By the end of this reader's rather cursory impression, he begins to "rewrite" the story into a more satisfying version.

(4) *juncture two: A prejudice man, he has no trust for anyone. Could be paranoid that everyone is out to get him, or try to take something from him. Does not trust his daughters*

juncture three: The story is following a pattern of a very prejudice man, who has no trust for anyone, I will not be surprised at anything he might do in the future.

juncture four: I don't like this man, someone should slap him around and his wife should find her a man in South Town, and tell her

husband that the other man is better the (sic) he is in bed.

Thus, in this study, low complexity readers seem less likely than high complexity readers to organize traits and psychological states around overriding explanatory traits. Instead, they typically list strings of related traits, or produce one or two traits early in the impression which dominate subsequent impressions. Sometimes, they appear to have exhausted the possibilities early in the story and either repeat initial impressions, or disengage from the story altogether.

Character Attributions as an Automatic Part of Reading

At each story juncture, readers were asked to answer two questions: "At this point in the story what is your overall response?" and "Why do you suppose the main character behaved as he did?" Before discussing their responses, it is important to note the rationale behind asking these questions in that particular order, as well as a necessary limitation of this procedure. It was theorized that the "overall response" question in the first impression would perhaps elicit differences between high and low complexity readers in the focus of response (Text-focused, Reader-focused).

Analyses of overall responses revealed, indeed, that high complexity readers made more text-focused responses, particularly as they related to external and psychological descriptions of characters, than did low complexity readers. An informal look at individual protocols revealed that high complexity readers focused largely on the motivations, beliefs, and psychological states of the story narrator, while some low complexity readers, by contrast, focused instead on some combination of their own personal concerns, the story in general, and/or the actions and motivations of the story character.

While the study's procedure uncovers an important question, it poses one problem: Since high complexity readers tended to gravitate toward character motivations in the first impression (without being asked to do so), they were possibly less likely to repeat such responses in the second impression. Hence, reported motivations of readers must be considered in light of the total number of motivations in both impressions, not just the second impression which specifically focused on character motivations. Thus, the following discussion will focus first on numbers of motivations in the second response condition, and later on particular motivations across response conditions.

Interestingly, analyses of the second impression revealed no significant main effects for peer complexity group and no significant interactions when high and low complexity readers were compared on motivations internal versus external to the character, traits versus psychological states, or motivational referents.

This finding presents somewhat of an anomaly: "Why would not readers of high cognitive complexity out-perform readers of low complexity on numbers of character attributions when specifically asked to do so?" This phenomenon is perhaps best explained when readers are compared on numbers of psychological states and traits across both response conditions. A look at group means in table 3 reveals that readers of high complexity, on the average, mention both more traits and more psychological states than their low complexity counterparts. When asked to speculate about the motivations of characters, both high and low complexity readers demonstrate an increase in numbers of psychological states in their impressions. Although high complexity readers mention more psychological states in the second response condition than in the first, they remain relatively stable in the tendency to note proportionately more states than traits (there is a slight rise of states over traits in the

second condition). Low complexity readers, on the other hand, note more traits than states in the first condition, then reverse this trend in the second condition, producing nearly twice as many traits as states.

Insert table 3 about here

A more qualitative look at individual impressions reveals that when low complexity readers were asked to speculate on character motivations in the second impression, a few readers in this group exhibited some fairly sophisticated insights. For example, this low complexity reader demonstrates some surprisingly complex attribution processes in describing the narrator's paranoia and related need for control:

(5) *Low complexity reader A, Impression two*

> *Juncture one: He [the main character] is very paranoid, and cannot trust anyone. This shows above all, that he cannot trust himself. Since he doesn't hold himself in high regard, he can't hold anyone else in high regard. He hates his family, himself, and the world.*
>
> *Juncture three: He loves the store because it is his, his statement to the world. He likes to have control over things, and the store is the only thing in his life he has complete control on. He was happy when he had just a little control over the sheriff. He wants to control his family, and when he can't he gets angry w/ them. He is a paranoid man who wants to control things before they control him.*

The foregoing excerpt reveals an attempt to organize character perceptions around overriding constructs (trust, control)--a characteristic typical of high complexity readers in the first impression. A similar tendency

is revealed in the following transcript of another low complexity reader on the second impression:

(6) *Low Complexity Reader B. Impression two*

Juncture one: The man has been brought up in a back woods area, where you had to fen for yourself. He feels he is the superior male figure and is over-protective of his two girls. Also he is untrusting of them and other people. Obviously he has never been close to people and feels alienated. He is probably a very lonely man who has good intentions but has been brought up in a bad en (sic.).

Juncture two: Once again, never any close relationships. He is a very lonely man who shows he has control over things by trying to control his family. He also shows how he has a grasp on life by putting down other people, thus making himself look better. For example, he prides himself on being an honest man. I almost feel as if his mom might have been a whore, or maybe his wife at some point, because he keeps saying his girl will be.

Juncture three: He's making himself feel a bit superior by telling the anecdote of playing with the sheriff's mind. After all, the sheriff is a person of authority and the narrator had the chance and did make him squirm. This man is so insecure that all his actions and stories somehow make him appear better than other people.

Juncture four: He killed this man at a time when he was very scared and unsure of what to do. Probably, he sees himself as the tough man who can kill, etc., but inside I'm sure he is very sad and upset about his action (of killing the man). Also, his insecurities came in, "no one was going to push him around. Finally, because he sees

himself as the protector it was his duty (he most likely thinks this) to kill for his family.

In this study such elaborated character impressions were the exception among low complexity readers. Their emergence, however, supports earlier findings by Hynds' (1985, 1989) where high complexity readers occasionally produced relatively noncomplex impressions of characters, while low complexity readers produced relatively complex character impressions. A closer look reveals that the two readers cited previously appeared to produce such elaborated character attributions only when asked to do so in the second impression. Their "overall responses" in the first impression showed growing signs of irritation, boredom and avoidance of the task, as indicated in the following excerpts:

(7) *Low Complexity Reader A, Impression one*

Juncture One: *This man is an idiot. He reminds me of the uneducated, poor people in my home town. They're afraid so they become tough and carry weapons. Their life is a pile of trash. The people I know like this usually drink a lot, which he didn't mention. I wouldn't want to be around any of these people they're stupid, but they think they know everything.*

Juncture two: *I still think he's a paranoid idiot. I feel sorry for his daughters: they should leave the house. He would be an embarrassment to live with. What a loser!*

Juncture Three: *I am bored. This man is stupid and his life is dull.*

Juncture Four: *I'm glad it's over. This is a horrible man, who would shoot another person because of the price of a loaf of bread.*

He's also gross because of the woman he keeps in town. What a loser. I feel sorry for Rosie.

Similarly, when asked for his "overall response" in impression one, Reader B moves from initial interest to growing dissatisfaction, eventually disengaging from the reading altogether:

(8) Low Complexity Reader B. (Impression one)

Juncture one: The story is interesting so far. The characters are being presented so you can get a feel of what they are like. The man seems to be overprotective and untrusting. Since this applies to the way many people, sometimes parents, are you want to continue reading. also having young girls makes the story more interesting for me.

Juncture two: The story is interesting. The main character is being developed further which is interesting but the story is going to get old if he keeps talking himself up and others down, there will be no suspense because I will feel that his point of view is very monotonous and incorrect. For example, the ideas that his girls are easy, and people "can't be trusted" have almost been ridden into the ground.

Juncture three: I'm getting bored, the sheriff incidence didn't make much sense or fit into the story (maybe later) Also he is still going on w/ how you can't trust people, maybe this is the point of the sheriffs incidence, but the point has been made, new thoughts need to be introduced and the sheriff story should have been it (maybe it was!!).

Thus, when asked specifically to speculate on characters' behaviors and beliefs, a few low complexity readers were able to do this. However, the overall response of these same readers revealed a growing irritation and

distractability when faced with a text that violated their expectations of how the world (and stories) are supposed to be. For low complexity readers in this study, sophisticated character attributions do not seem to be an automatic or natural part of reading.

It should be noted also that just as a few low complexity readers revealed the capability to form sophisticated impressions of literary characters, high complexity readers sometimes voiced disinterest in the story, and occasionally abandoned the search for character motivations, focusing on tangential or irrelevant remarks. Thus, this study lends tentative support to the notion that some people who appear relatively noncomplex on a measure of cognitive complexity can exhibit sophisticated perceptions of literary characters when asked to do so, while complex readers can be diverted from the literary text by personal or affective reactions. Therefore, this preliminary investigation, when placed in the context of other studies (Hynds, 1985, 1989), suggests that bringing personal constructs and social cognitive competencies to reading is not an automatic process, and must be cultivated as a necessary part of the reading act.

Cognitive Complexity, Personal Tangents, and Rewriting the Text

Overall, no significant differences emerged between high and low complexity readers in the area of Tangential responses (reiteration, questions, personal asides). A closer look at such responses, however, reveals some interesting qualitative differences. It appears that when high complexity readers focus attention outside of their immediate encounter with the text, they typically do so as a way of reflecting on their own response processes by acknowledging reiterations of previous statements or perceptions from one story juncture to the next (i.e., "my response is basically the same."). A few high complexity readers made Tangential comments in the form of ironic or sarcastic

commentaries on the main character. For example:

(9) Jesse Helms, right? I didn't know he owned a store!; is he Jerry Brown? I'm dying to know!

(10) I'm becoming more and more impressed with this gentleman's cosmopolitan background, particularly his high esteem for women and minorities. No doubt, a democrat with such liberal high-minded values. Now I definitely want my daughter to marry him!

Low Complexity readers, by contrast, seemed to make tangential comments in the form of "shoulds or oughts" which attempt to "rewrite the text" (the character should, the author ought...) or personal tangents. For example, these low complexity readers observed:

(11) He [the main character] needs to take speech 100 to earn persuasive methods of communication rather than relying on violence.

(12) Someone should slap him around and his wife should find a man in South town, and tell her husband that the other man is better the (sic) he is in bed.

(13) This guy should be shot.

Other low complexity readers focused on personal attitudes or reminiscences tangential to the story. Sometimes such personal attitudes or reflections appeared to divert readers from the story:

(14) I have no desire to read any more of this story...it angers me very much because I do not like prejudice people, or people like this man.

(15) I don't like bitterness in people. I want people to trust me, not to think that I am out to get them. I feel so sorry for his family, I don't know what I would do if my father repressed as he does to his daughters.

Although a certain amount of personal philosophizing contributes to a meaningful reading, when readers become caught up in personal tangents they sometimes lose sight of the text altogether. This low complexity reader, for example, becomes increasingly distracted by what she perceives to be a personal affront toward people from the South:

(16) *juncture one: I get the impression that this story is a criticism on Southerners, especially Alabamians, but maybe that's because I'm from Alabama."*

juncture two: "It seems again that Birmingham is slighted against which I resent. Especially the term 'Birmingham whore.' (I'm not from there but it still hits close to home!)"

juncture three: "I now think that a message is coming through: Southerners are bad. I'm now pretty sure my response is negative because not all of us are rednecks. I'm sleepy so I can't really do well on this part.

One wonders if the reader's "sleepiness" is really disengagement and refusal to enter into a text which appears to violate her perceptions of the world. Whatever the case, the reader's negative response to a relatively insignificant story detail distracts her from any further involvement.

The distractability and impatience of low complexity readers in this study parallels findings by Hynds (1989). In her case study of four adolescent readers, one informant who demonstrated weak relationships between construing in the social world and construing in the fictional realm was frequently distracted from the reading experience by personal asides or irrelevancies. Similarly, Garrison and Hynds (1989) found that less proficient readers on the college level often lapsed into personal "reader bound" responses that kept them from sophisticated interpretive processes. Less proficient readers in

Garrison and Hynds' study often refused to accept literary texts on their own terms, attemption to "rewrite" or restructure the text at hand to be more in keeping with some ideal text that they would prefer to read.

Thus, although no quantitative differences emerged in the area of tangential responses, these exploratory results point to the fact that low complexity readers may be distracted from the reading experience by personal asides, and may occasionally refust to accept the literary text on its own terms.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of interpersonal cognitive complexity in the literary response and character attribution processes of young adult readers. Analyses of literary responses revealed that cognitive complexity was more associated with the ways in which readers understood and interpreted the text, than with more personal or affective responses. Further, while cognitive complexity appeared to underlie story comprehension, it was more associated with inferential than descriptive responses. More specifically, cognitive complexity related to inferences about characters rather than more general aspects of the story, such as formal structure or theme.

Analyses of specific character attributions revealed that, in comparison to low complexity readers, high complexity readers typically made more attributions about characters' internal and external states in their general story impressions, without being prompted to do so. Often, high complexity readers organized a variety of traits and psychological states around overriding explanatory traits. For these readers, character traits served as organizing principles for other traits and psychological states. Low complexity readers, by contrast, tended to list strings of traits with little

elaboration, or produce monolithic impressions organized around one or two traits. Thus, low complexity readers in this study tended to stereotype literary characters in terms of one or two overriding traits, with little elaboration or explanation of how those traits related to other aspects of the character's personality.

When overall response impressions were compared with character motivation impressions, high complexity readers typically mentioned psychological traits as overarching principles or explanations for temporal states, both in the first and the second impression. Low complexity readers, by contrast, did so infrequently, and only in the second impression (responding to an external prompt). A closer look revealed that boredom or negative responses to the story character may have occasionally caused both high and low complexity readers to abandon the impression formation task. The fact that some low complexity readers in this study were capable of sophisticated insights, but only verbalized them when asked to do so seems to corroborate the notion that how reading is approached or what stances readers are asked to take has a powerful impact on the social-cognitive aspects of their response processes.

While no significant differences emerged betweeen high and low complexity readers in the area of tangential responses, qualitative analyses revealed that low complexity readers tended more often to "rewrite" the text in the form of "shoulds" or "oughts," or to become distracted from the text by their personal associations or reminiscences. Thus, this study suggests that interpersonal cognitive complexity is a social-cognitive attribute which influences readers as they make inferences about characters in an attempt to understand a literary text. Possibly, the ability to make these inferences may result in less distraction from the reading experience.

It is important to note, however, that this particular story may not have

evoked sophisticated social-cognitive attributions among all readers, because the main character may have been perceived as stereotypic or predictable. Early studies of social cognition posited that perceivers function as "naive personality theorists" (Bruner and Tagiuri, 1954), attempting to integrate beliefs about another into a coherent general impression of his or her personality. Recently, O'Keefe and Delia (1982) have argued that "often an interpersonal impression is elaborated to account for and predict another's behavior only within quite limited behavioral contexts (p.43)." Thus, In some contexts (either literary or social), perceivers may not need to employ a large variety of interpersonal constructs (i.e., when characters are predictable, when good friends become so well-known and relationships so established that few behavioral anomalies occur). In both literature and life, perceivers may be able to predict the behaviors and beliefs of individuals on the basis of a few stereotypic constructs, and thus feel no need to engage in high level social-cognitive processes. Future studies involving several stories will begin to shed some light on how readers use social-cognitive competencies in a variety of reading contexts.

Furthermore, readers may not employ a sophisticated repertoire of interpersonal constructs in response to texts because they may lack the volition, or because they lack the pragmatic sense of how to demonstrate their interpersonal competence in written character impressions. As Hynds (1989) has suggested, the interplay among competence, pragmatics, and volition is most likely influenced by readers' experiences in schools. If literature is presented in classrooms as memorizing trivia for a test, rather than a meaningful search for what makes characters behave as they do, then readers may never develop the will or the way to bring social-cognitive knowledge to texts.

Although exploratory in nature, this study suggests a variety of

directions for future research. Investigations which involve readers at various levels of schooling, as well as studies which compare and contrast readers' responses to a variety of stories would highlight the specific ways in which social-cognitive processes develop in the fictional realm. Further, as Rubin (1984) and others (Rubin, Piche, Michelin, & Johnson, 1984) have argued, "social cognition" is probably a multidimensional, and not a unitary construct. That is, studies of social cognition based solely upon Crockett's RCQ provide information about only one aspect of social construing: construct differentation, or numbers of constructs in the construct repertoire. Studies which involve a variety of social-cognitive measures (i.e., construct abstractness, integration, role-taking) might shed further light on the social-cognitive processes which underly readers' interpretations of and responses to stories. Finally, more studies should be conducted on specific contextual factors which contribute to readers' tendencies to bring social knowledge to literary texts. Such explorations will provide valuable implications and understandings for educators as they help readers to develop the social-cognitive competencies essential to reading.

In sum, this study adds further support to the notion that cognitive complexity is essential, not only for making attributions about people in the social world, but for making attributions about characters in stories. Thus, the study of literature involves more than the ability to comprehend the world of the literary text; it demands a closely related understanding of why people do what they do in the world beyond. Interestingly, though, cognitive complexity in this study, and in previous work, remains relatively unrelated to students' literal comprehension processes, or descriptive observations about literary works. Similarly, cognitive complexity in this study was unrelated to reader-focused responses such as evaluation or engagement. Consequently,

teachers who assess students' progress in literature classes by means of short-answer and/or literal comprehension tests, or in terms of readers' personal statements in journals and class discussion may not be accurately assessing whether or how readers are able to understand the complex motivations, behaviors, and beliefs of literary characters.

In his recent study of literature teaching in programs with reputations for excellence in English, Applebee (1989) noted much of the writing that about literature that students are asked to do is "of the five paragraph theme variety, rather formulaic. Writing is still used largely for assessment purposes, rather than as a way to get students thinking and learning" (p. 32). Applebee and his assistants reportedly encountered mostly "worksheets; objective, short-answer type tests; very structured, thesis/support essay assignments; and more in-class writing assignments than [they] expected...." (p. 32-33).

Given the rather formulaic, literal nature of current literature assessment in many classrooms, we might begin to explore alternative ways to encourage and assess the sort of character attribution processes so essential to literary reading. Rosenblatt (1985) has recently argued for the need to envision the reading act in its "personal, social, cultural matrix" (p. 104). She observes: "Not only what the reader brings to the transaction from past experience with life and language, but also the socially molded circumstances and purpose of the reading, provide the setting for the act of symbolization. The reading event should be seen in its total matrix" (p 104). As a part of seeing literary reading in its "total matrix," we can perhaps begin by presenting literary texts and literary reading as a complex act of looking beyond and beneath the surface to discover what makes characters and people believe and behave the way they do.

References

Applebee, A.N. (1973). The spectator role: Theoretical and developmental studies of ideas about and responses to literature, with special reference to four age levels. Doctoral Dissertation, University of London.

Applebee, A.N. (1989). The teaching of literature in programs with reputations for excellence in English (Report No. 1.1). Albany, N.Y.: Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature.

Beach, R. (1983). Attitudes, social conventions and response to literature. Journal of Research and Development in Education, 16, 47-54.

Beach, R. & Brunetti, G. (1976). Differences between high school and university students in their conceptions of literary characters. Research in the Teaching of English, 10, 259-268.

Beach, R. & Hynds, S. (in press). Research on response to literature. In R. Barr, M.L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, and P.D. Pearson (Eds.), The second handbook of reading research. White Plains: Longman.

Beach, R. & Wendler, L. (in press). Developmental differences in response to a short story. Research in the Teaching of English.

Black, J. B. Galambos, J. A. & Read, S. J. (1984). Comprehending stories and social situations. In T. Wyer & K. Srull (Eds.), Handbook of social cognition. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

Bower, G. H. (1978). Experiments on story comprehension and recall, Discourse Processes 1 211-231.

Bruce, B. (1981). A social interaction model of reading. Discourse Processes, 4, 273-311.

Bruner, J. S. & Tagiuri, R. (1954). The perception of people. In G. Lindzey (Ed.), Handbook of social psychology (Vol. 2). Reading, Ma.: Addison-Wesley.

Burleson, B.R., Applegate, J.L., & Neuwirth, C.M. (1981). Is cognitive complexity loquacity? A reply to Powers, Jordan and Street. Human Communication Research, *7, 212-225.*

Crockett, W. H. (1965) Cognitive complexity and impression formation. In B. Maher (Ed.), Progress in experimental personality research *(Vol.2). New York: Academic Press.*

Crockett, W. H. Press, A. N. Delia, J. G. & Kenny, C. T. (1974). Structural analysis of the organization of written impressions. Unpublished manuscript. University of Kansas.

Flynn, E. (1983). Gender and reading. College English, *45, 236-253.*

Galda, L. (1983). Research in response to literature. Journal of Research and Development in Education, *16, 1-7.*

Garrison, B. & Hynds, S. (1989). Charting the transaction between reader and text: A comparison of proficient and less proficient readers. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Golden, J. & Guthrie, J. 91986). Convergence and divergence in reader response to literature. Reading Research Quarterly, *21, 408-421.*

Goldman, S. R. (1982). Knowledge systems for realistic goals. Discourse Processes, *5, 279-303.*

Gruenich, R. & Trabasso, T. (1981). The story as social environment: Children's comprehension and evaluation of intentions and consequences. In J. Harvey (Ed.), Cognition, social behavior, and the environment. *Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.*

Hale, C.L. (1980). Cognitive complexity-simplicity as a determination of communication effectiveness. Communication Monographs, *47, 304-311.*

Hynds, S. (1985). Interpersonal cognitive complexity and the literary response processes of adolescent readers. Research in the Teaching of English, *19,*

386-404.

Hynds, S. (1989). Bringing life to literature and literature to life: Social constructs and contexts of four adolescent readers. Research in the Teaching of English, *23, 30-61.*

Hynds, S. (in press). Reading as a social event: Comprehension and response in the classroom, text, and world. In S. Straw & D. Bogdan (Eds.) Beyond communication: Reading comprehension and criticism. *Portsmouth, N.H.: Boynton/Cook.*

Johnson, N. S. & Mandler, J .M. (1980). A tale of two structures: Underlying and surface forms in stories. Poetics, *9, 51-86.*

Jose, P. E. (1988). Liking of Plan-based stories: The role of goal importance and goal attainment difficulty. Discourse Processes *11, (3), p. 261-275.*

Jose, P. & Brewer, W. (1984). The development of story liking: Character identification, suspense and outcome resolution). Developmental Psychology, *20, 911-924.*

Kelly, G. A. (1955). A theory of personality. *New York: Norton.*

Lehr, Susan (1988). The child's developing sense of theme as a response to literature, Reading Research Quarterly, *23, (3), pp. 337-357*

MacLean, M. (1986). A framework for analyzing reader-text interactions. Journal of Research and Development in Education, *19, 16-21.*

Mandler, J. M. & Johnson, N. S. (1977). Remembrance of things parsed: story structure and recall. Cognitive psychology, *4, 305-312.*

McAffee, T. (1966). This is my living room. In J. Moffett (Ed.), Points of View.

Omanson, R.C., Warren, W.H., & Trabasso, T. (1978). Goals, inferential comprehension, and recall of stories by children. Discourse Processes, *1 337-354.*

O'Keefe, B. J. & Delia, J. G. (1982). Impression formation and message production. In M. E. Roloff & Charles R. Berger (Eds.), Social cognition and communication. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Purves, A. C. with Rippere, V. (1968). Elements of writing about a literary work: A study of response to literature. Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English.

Purves, A. C. (1973). Literature education in ten countries: An empirical study. New York: John Wiley.

Purves, A. C. (1986). Cultural literacy and research in response to literature. Paper presented at the annual NCTE Assembly on Research conference, Chicago.

Richards, I. A. (1929). Practical criticism. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World.

Rosenblatt, L.M. (1985). Viewpoints: Transaction versus interaction--A terminological rescue operation. Research in the Teaching of English, 19, 96-107.

Rubin, D. L. (1985). Response to Burleson and Rowan's "response to Rubin et al." Written Communication, 1, 211-245.

Rubin, D. L., Piche, G. L., Michelin, M. L. & Johnson, F. L. (1984). Social cognitive ability as a predictor of the quality of fourth-graders' written narrtives. In R. Beach & L. Bridwell (Eds.), New directions in composition research. New York: Guilford.

Rumelhart, D. E. (1977). Understanding and summarizing brief stories. In D. LaBerge & S. T. Samuels (Eds.), Basic processes in reading: Pe eption and comprehension. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

Rumelhart, D. E. & Ortony A. (1977). The representation of knowledge in memory. In R. Anderson, R. Spiro, & W. Montague (Eds.), Schooling and the

acquisition of knowledge. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

Schank, R. C. & Abelson, R. P. (1977). Scripts, plans, goals, and understanding. Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum.

Squire, J. R. (1964). The response of adolescents while reading four short stories. Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English.

Stein, N. L. (1979). How children understand stories. In L. Katz (Ed.), Current topics in early childhood education (Vol. 2). Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.

Stein, N. L. & Glenn, C. G. (1979). An analysis of story comprehension in elementary school children. In R. O. Freedle (Ed.), Advances in Discourse Processes (Vol 2): New directions in discourse processing. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.

Sundbye, Nita (1987). Text explicitness and inferential questioning: Effects on story understanding and recall, Reading Research Quarterly, 22, (1), pp. 82-97

Wilson, J. R. (1966). Responses of college freshemen to three novels. Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English.

Table 1

Categories of Response and Character Attribution

IMPRESSION ONE -- OVERALL RESPONSE

I. TEXT-FOCUSED RESPONSES

A. LITERAL

These responses include: (a) Descriptions of the work ("The author uses descriptions..") (b) Character Descriptions ("He's a southerner." (c) Descriptions of Context ("It takes place in the south.")

B. INTERPRETIVE

1. STORY INFERENCES ("It's a story about the cruelty of people.")

2. CHARACTER INFERENCES

a. CHARACTER INTERNAL

(1) TRAITS ("He is stubborn, paranoid, etc.")

(2) PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES ("He feels angry," "He thinks she hates him."

b. CHARACTER EXTERNAL

These responses include: (a) Discrepancies and Inconsistencies in Behavior and Attitudes ("He acts like a tough guy, but he beats his wife" (b) Telescoped, or Inferred Descriptive observations ("He probably was poor") (c) Situational Determinants of the Character's Behavior ("When people do this, he...")

II. READER-FOCUSED RESPONSES

These responses include: (a) Personal Evaluations ("It was a stupid story") (b) Engagement ("I'm interested, excited") (c) Disengagement ("I'm bored, turned off.")

III. TANGENTIAL RESPONSES

Table 1

Categories of Response and Character Attribution (cont.)

IMPRESSION TWO -- CHARACTER ATTRIBUTIONS

I. MOTIVATIONS

A. EXTERNAL TO CHARACTER

These responses include (a) References to the Social Context ("This was probably in the rural south.") (b) References to the Character's Background ("He probably had a mean father.") (c) References to the Character's Behaviors Relevant to Character Motivations ("He probably killed the black guy, so...")

B. INTERNAL TO CHARACTER

1. TRAITS ("He's a bigot.")

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL STATES

These responses include (a) Goals ("He wants to get away with it.") (b) Strategies ("He is trying to...") (c) Attitudes or Beliefs ("He thinks, believes...") (d) Feelings and Emotions ("He feels, he is hurt...") (e) Metaperspectives ("He thinks others feel...")

II. MOTIVATIONAL REFERENTS

III. TANGENTIAL RESPONSES

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Responses by Complexity Group

	High Complexity Group (n = 18)		Low Complexity Group (n = 22)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Response Type				
Impression One -- Overall Response				
Text-Focused	22.30	8.26	15.59	5.51
Reader-Focused	6.50	5.10	6.54	3.76
Literal	5.08	3.64	3.84	2.37
Interpretive	17.21	6.68	11.75	5.11
Story Inferences	1.00	1.64	.88	1.23
Char. Inferences	16.22	6.77	10.86	5.41
Char. Internal	13.08	5.53	9.11	5.06
Char. External	3.13	2.35	1.75	1.14
Traits	5.28	2.25	5.31	3.15
Psychological States	7.68	4.99	4.20	2.82
Tangential Responses	6.78	4.09	6.33	3.87
Impression Two -- Character Motivations				
Internal Motivations	11.88	5.82	9.70	4.87
External Motivations	5.36	2.73	5.65	2.79
Traits	4.00	3.12	2.22	1.50
Psychological States	7.88	4.05	7.47	4.35
Motivational Ref.	1.97	1.77	2.02	2.32
Tangential Responses	3.11	2.32	3.84	3.30

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Psychological Traits and States Across Impressions by Complexity Groups

	Impression One (Overall Response)		*Impression Two (Character Motivations)*	
	traits mean (SD)	*states mean (SD)*	*traits mean (SD)*	*states mean (SD)*
High Complexity (n = 18)	*5.28 (2.25)*	*7.68 (4.99)*	*4.00 (3.12)*	*7.88 (4.05)*
Low Complexity (n = 22)	*5.31 (3.15)*	*4.20 (2.82)*	*2.22 (1.50)*	*7.47 (4.35)*