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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the concept of reader stance as defined by L. Rosenblatt (1978, 1994) as a useful framework from which to view the relative imbalance between the efferent and aesthetic reading of literature, particularly among schoolage adolescents. It then examines how 4 theoretical models and perspectives offer considerable explanatory insight into the process and virtue of adopting an aesthetic reading stance. According to the essay, schema theory provides a foundation for viewing the comprehension process in general, and aesthetic reading in particular, as a process that depends on the unique personal experience and world knowledge of the individual reader. Second, dual coding theory is featured for its explanation of the connection between imagery and affect, offering a powerful explanation of the way imagery serves aesthetic functions. Third, the model of attitude influence provides a thorough description of the ways in which an aesthetic reading can significantly impact both a reader's intention to read or continue reading, as well as attitude toward reading in general. Finally, the essay finds that the R. Ruddell and N. Unrau model (1994) accounts for the motivational value of reader stance, while also accounting for the teacher's instructional stance and its relationship to the conceptions of text, task, and the source of authority within the meaning negotiation process of the classroom. The essay suggests, in conclusion, implications for research and practice that reflect an evolving appreciation of the role of an aesthetic stance in reading and responding to literature. Contains 32 references. (TB)

The Significance of Stance

An Invitation to Aesthetic Response

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

A common lament among teachers everywhere, particularly those "consigned" to working with the young student of literature, is that "they simply don't want to read!" — a sentiment often accompanied by concern for the alleged decline in literacy among recent generations, a concern which has not been borne out in most contemporary literacy research that generally acknowledges the dynamic and evolving definitions and conceptions of literacy (Graff, 1987; Heath, 1988; Resnick & Resnick, 1988; Scribner & Cole, 1988).

Similarly, to assert that students "don't want to read" seems itself a bit too presumptive, even in light of a host of entertainment alternatives available to and preferred by the current television or "Nintendo" generation. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that many students simply don't like *what* they are reading or the *way* in which they are being asked to read — tantamount, in some ways, to imposing an archaic or socioculturally "unsituated" conception of literacy upon a particular segment of society — in this case, school-aged students of literature. Whether we are defining literacy within a society or constructing a reading program in our classrooms, serious consideration must be given to the personal meaning and significance of both the literacy and *literary* practices in our classrooms if we are to understand more fully our role as educators in helping students to value both literacy *and* literature.

However, such a student-centered approach — one that acknowledges the importance of the personal construction of meaning (Bruner, 1986; Ruddell & Unrau, 1994) — is lacking in both our popular conceptions about literacy and our pedagogical tendencies in the literature classroom. These tendencies have taken form most concretely in the developmental models of reading comprehension which place a premium upon literal comprehension as a prerequisite to higher order reasoning and a more creative (and *aesthetic*) response, reflecting assumptions which tend to portray the reading of all texts as an analytical and generally reductive activity. Such assumptions are being enacted daily in our literature classrooms, manifested in a

dependence upon literal questioning that most certainly reinforces and is reinforced by standardized tests and by available textbooks and teaching materials (Anderson & Rubano, 1991). One recent study of secondary teachers in the United States, for example, finds that 80% of the questions being asked elicit textual knowledge and focus upon literal comprehension (Beach & Hynds, 1990; in Squire, 1994) — thus promoting what Louise Rosenblatt calls a predominantly "efferent" reading, one in which the reader is primarily concerned with extracting information from the text (Rosenblatt, 1978; 1994).

Certainly much of this emphasis upon what might be called "literal" or "efferent" reading can be attributed to the dominant model of literary criticism over the past 50 years — the so-called "New Criticism" — that despite having been superseded several times over by newer critical theories, seems to have held sway in a majority of literature classrooms, with its emphasis upon finding the "objective" or authoritative meaning of the text (Anderson & Rubano, 1991; Beach, 1993; Squire, 1994). Such a condition is ironic given the strong constructivist emphasis in recent mainstream reading research (Ruddell & Unrau, 1994; Anderson & Rubano, 1991), an emphasis borne out of current theoretical assumptions regarding the social nature and function of language (Vygotsky, 1978) and the belief that learning is an inherently constructive process in which the learner — and, therefore, the reader — actively creates one of many "possible worlds" within an environment that fosters the expression of stance and invites counter-stance (Bruner, 1986). Such theoretical assumptions underscore the importance of promoting literature reading that is personally meaningful and significant and which is more conducive to what Rosenblatt calls an "aesthetic" response, concerned primarily with the "lived-through" experience of the text (Rosenblatt, 1978; 1994).

How, then, do we as educators change the face of our literature classrooms to reflect a more constructivist approach to learning? Given the current imbalance in our literature classrooms toward a predominantly efferent stance, an obvious point of departure for such change would be to create a classroom atmosphere which invites a more aesthetic stance from

its young readers. To better conceive of this goal, the following questions will serve to frame the remainder of this discussion: (1) What is an aesthetic reading stance, and how is it assumed or created? (2) Why is the assumption of such a stance so vital to the reading of literature? (3) What implications for further research can be gleaned from this discussion, and in what ways can literature instruction serve to promote and enhance aesthetic reading and response?

To answer these questions, I will begin by exploring the concept of reader stance as it is defined by Rosenblatt (1978, 1994) as a useful framework from which to view the relative imbalance between the efferent and aesthetic reading of literature, particularly among school-age adolescents. Within the context of this framework, I will then examine how four theoretical models and perspectives offer considerable explanatory insight into the process and virtue of adopting an aesthetic reading stance: First, schema theory provides a foundation for viewing the comprehension process in general, and aesthetic reading in particular, as a process which depends upon the unique personal experience and world knowledge of the individual reader. Next, Dual Coding Theory is featured for its explanation of the connection between imagery and affect, offering a powerful explanation of the way imagery serves aesthetic functions. The Model of Attitude Influence follows, providing a thorough description of the ways in which an aesthetic reading can significantly impact both a reader's *intention* to read or continue reading, as well as one's *attitude* toward reading in general. Finally, the Ruddell/Unrau model accounts for the motivational value of reader stance as well, while also accounting for the teacher's instructional stance and its relationship to the conceptions of text, task, and the source of authority within the meaning negotiation process of the classroom. After reviewing these various theoretical perspectives of the aesthetic stance, I will suggest implications for research and practice that reflect an evolving appreciation for the role of an aesthetic stance in reading and responding to literature.

PART II: READER RESPONSE AND THE AESTHETIC STANCE

Reader Response Theory

Although various theories of reader response actually exist, they can all be loosely characterized as sharing a concern with how readers make meaning from their experience with the text (Beach, 1993). The evolution of reader response theories over the past thirty years has been described as the third stage in the history of modern literary theory — preceded first by the Romantic period and its preoccupation with the *author*, and followed more recently by the New Critical orientation and its exclusive concern with the *text*. New Criticism, with its focus upon "extracting" meaning from the text, dominated both theory and practice throughout the middle third of the twentieth century while still retaining a strong presence in literature classrooms at all levels today (Beach, 1993).

Although reader response theories represent the most recent "stage" in the evolution of modern literary theory, research in reader response dates back to the 1920's, beginning with I. A. Richards' study, *Practical Criticism*, in which Richards analyzed the protocols describing the reactions to thirteen poems by selected university students (Beach, 1993; Squire, 1994). And while it is generally regarded as the first study of reader response and has exerted the most influence in the methodology of response research, it is Louise Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing, first introduced in the 1930's, that has shaped the assumptions and emphases of much reader response research.

Drawing upon Dewey and Bentley's transactional psychology which posits that their can be "no radical separation ... between what is observed and the observer (Dewey, J., & Bentley, A., 1949, p. 103), Rosenblatt insists upon the term *transaction* to describe the reading act, a term that "designates an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are, one might say, aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 17). Within this transactional framework, the reader and the text are "two aspects of a total dynamic situation, where the 'meaning' does not lie ready-made 'in' the text or 'in' the

reader, but happens, comes into being during the transaction between reader and text" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1163).

Rosenblatt and the Significance of Stance

A central contribution of Rosenblatt's transactional theory has been her discussion of reader stance as a critical factor in understanding how readers transact with a text. While the tendency in reading and literary theory had been traditionally to assume that stance was dependent entirely upon the texts involved, Rosenblatt argued that readers adopt a stance, either consciously or unconsciously, which "determines the proportion or mix of public or private elements of sense that fall within the scope of the reader's selective attention," effectually mirroring the reader's purpose (p. 1066). Any reading event must then fall somewhere on a continuum (see Figure 1 below), depending upon whether the reader adopts what Rosenblatt calls a "predominantly efferent" or a "predominantly aesthetic" stance (Rosenblatt, 1994, pp. 1066-1069). As described earlier, the term "efferent" (from he Latin word "effere," meaning "to carry away") refers to the kind of reading in which attention is centered upon what is to be extracted or carried away after the reading event, while the term "aesthetic" refers to the kind of reading in which "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (Rosenblatt, 1978, pp. 24-25).

How, then, is stance created? In answering this question, Rosenblatt argues that it is important to understand William James's psychological concept of selective attention within the context of a reader's "linguistic-experiential reservoir" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1061). In the course of perceiving our world, James insists that we are constantly engaged in a "choosing activity" where we select out of the stream, or field, of consciousness "by the reinforcing and inhibiting agency of attention" (James, 1920; 1983, p. 51). Therefore, whichever perceptions are

pushed into the background or brought into awareness depends upon where selective attention is focused (James, 1983, Rosenblatt, 1994).

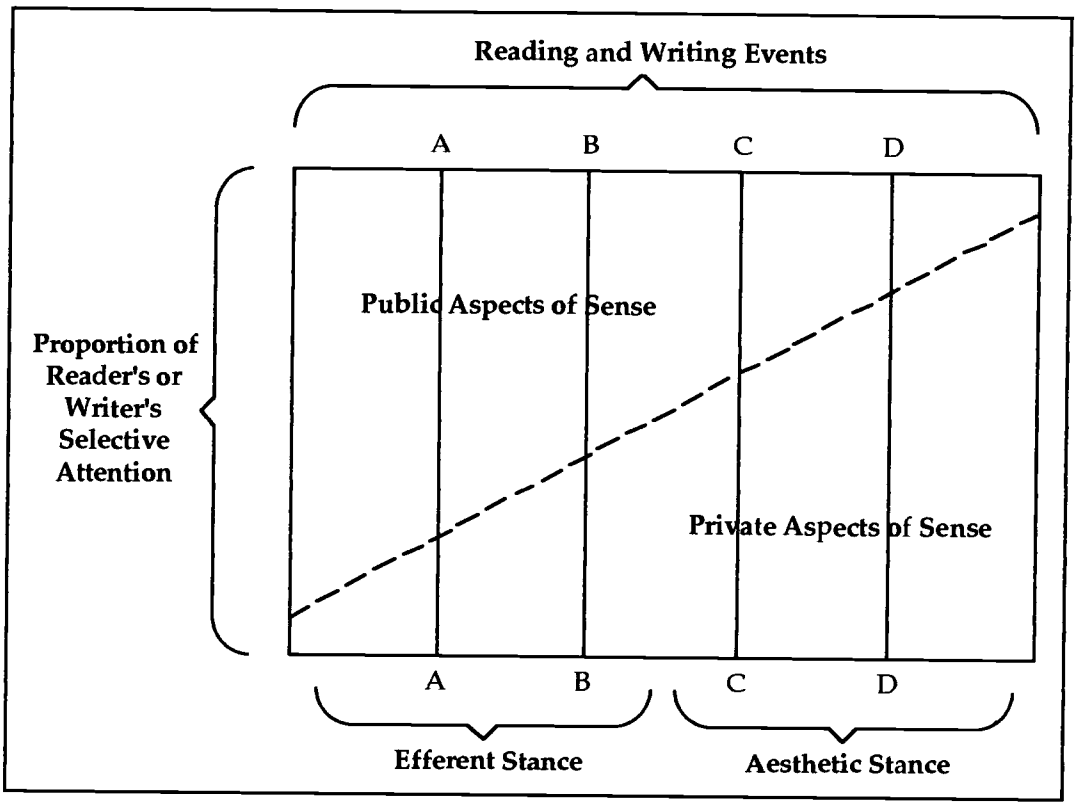


Figure 1: The Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum, described within the Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing (Rosenblatt, 1994)

Rosenblatt further argues that the process of selectively focusing attention is the result of each participant's unique linguistic-experiential reservoir, the cognitive and affective manifestation of their individual histories. These reservoirs form the basis for interpretation within any linguistic event (reading, writing, speaking, & listening), whereby "any interpretations or new meanings are restructurings or extensions of the stock of experiences of language, spoken and written, brought to the task" (p. 1062). During a transaction with the text, therefore, we may assume a stance by being selectively attentive to aspects of the text which activate our linguistic-experiential reservoirs, as Rosenblatt eloquently notes when discussing the reader's response to the physical text or "patterns of signs":

> When we see a set of such marks on the page, we believe that it should give rise to some more or less coherent meaning. We bring our funded experience to bear. Multiple inner alternatives resonate to the signs. Not only the triadic linkages with the signs, but also certain organismic states, or certain ranges of feeling, are stirred-up in the linguistic-experiential reservoir. From these activated areas, selective attention — conditioned, as we have seen, by multiple physical, personal, social, and cultural factors entering into the situation — picks out elements that will be organized and synthesized into what constitutes "meaning" (p. 1064).

It is important to note at this point that this "choosing activity," resulting from the assumption of a particular stance reflecting the reader's purpose, results not only from expectations provided by past experiences with language and with texts. Other contextual factors, such as the reader's present situation and interests, may influence the adoption of a particular stance or induce fluctuations of stance within a particular reading. Rosenblatt discusses this "cueing process" in the adoption of stance:

> Since each reading is an event in particular circumstances, the same text may be read either efferently or aesthetically. The experienced reader usually approaches a text alert to cues offered by the text and, unless another purpose intervenes, automatically adopts the appropriate predominant stance ... Of course, the reader may overlook or misconstrue the cues, or they may be confusing. And the reader's own purpose, or schooling that indoctrinates the same undifferentiated approach to all texts, may dictate a different stance from the one the writer intended (pp. 1069-1070).

In acknowledging the significance of contextual influences upon the reader's adoption of stance, Rosenblatt demonstrates the importance of various socializing forces, either at home or at school, which lead to the adoption of a particular stance. For example, this influence is most clearly exemplified in the plight of the high school literature student who reads an assigned piece of literature, knowing that he faces a test the next day on the factual recall of character

and plot. Consequently, rather than adopting a predominantly aesthetic stance, he will more than likely be "cued" into reading the piece more efferently, perhaps being denied an aesthetic response that is so instrumental in constructing meaning and sustaining one's motivation to read literature.

In fact, current research indicates that such inappropriate "cueing" can indeed limit the construction of meaning. Although such research is relatively sparse, significant empirical support for the beneficial role of aesthetic stance in comprehension comes from the work of Joyce Many and others (Many, 1994; Wiseman, Many, & Altieri, 1992). Many's study, for example, attempted to (1) describe the stances taken in eighth grade subjects' responses to literature, (2) analyze the relationship between reader's stance in a response and the level of understanding reached in the response, and (3) analyze whether the relationship between reader stance and level of understanding is consistent across texts. Subjects were asked to read each short story and then respond to the prompt "Write anything you want about the story you just read." The responses were then analyzed to determine the primary stance of the response as a whole and the level of understanding reached. Reader stance was rated for each written response on a five-point scale (from "most efferent" to "most aesthetic"), while level of personal understanding was rated on a four-point scale which indicated the degree to which a particular written response is tied to story events (and a focus upon the "literal meaning" of the story) and the level of abstract generalization reached in the response (ranging from *interpretation, analogy* to oneself and the world, and *general understanding* about life). Her results indicate that for all three stories, subjects focusing on the aesthetic stance were significantly more likely to *interpret* story events, to *apply* story events to life, and to draw *generalizations* about the world. Empirical results such as these strongly indicate a correlative link between the efferent-aesthetic stance continuum and the construction of meaning, and they specifically suggest the need for consistently adopting an aesthetic stance when reading and responding to literature.

Therefore, creating and maintaining a predominantly aesthetic stance when reading literature is critical to experiencing the literary "transaction," a transaction that reflects the total engagement of the reader in the "lived-through" journey of constructed meanings provided by a literary work. However, as Rosenblatt has observed, the emphasis in our schools in the teaching of reading has been almost entirely from the efferent stance (1978, p. 79). And it is her belief that our first concern in the teaching of reading and writing at any level should be to create environments and activities in which students are motivated and encouraged to draw on their own resources to make "live" meanings (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1082). As we can see from subsequent research in the field of reading, Rosenblatt's transactive literary theory and her insistence upon the virtues of the aesthetic stance in reading literature are well-founded.

PART III: STRENGTHENING THE CASE FOR AN AESTHETIC STANCE

As Squire has noted (1994), when reading research began to recognize the importance of a reader's personal schemata and prior knowledge in shaping comprehension, Rosenblatt's transactional theory began to hold even greater significance in the field of reading research, for it had recognized that both "aesthetic" response to literature and "efferent" comprehension of informational prose are both clearly influenced by the reader's prior knowledge and experience. Other recent developments in reading research and theory reflect Rosenblatt's contributions and underscore the importance of assuming an aesthetic stance when reading literature.

The following theories and models of reading offer a variety of perspectives from which to view the reading process and to appreciate the value of an aesthetic stance. The order in which they are presented is generally suggestive of their theoretical and explanatory scope within the discussion of aesthetic stance, moving initially from a more narrow cognitive psychological orientation to a broader, more sociocognitive lens. This discussion begins with Schema Theory, one of the first and most influential cognitive theories to account for the individual reader's unique personal experience and world knowledge, essential for any aesthetic or "lived-through" reading. Next, Dual Coding Theory, a more contemporary theory of cognition, is introduced for its ability to account for the way imagery serves aesthetic functions within the meaning construction process. The discussion then shifts to Mathewson's Model of Attitude Influence, which accounts for the affective and social variables that motivate all readers to read while clearly establishing the link between motivation and an aesthetic reading stance. Finally, the Ruddell and Unrau Model of Reading as a Meaning Construction Process places this discussion of aesthetic reading within the classroom context as it accounts for the teacher's critical role in choosing an appropriate instructional stance and, consequently, helping to create a learning environment that invites aesthetic responses to literature.

The Contribution of Schema Theory

Schema theory, as described by Anderson (1994), is a more general theory of cognition which proposes that a reader's knowledge of the world is organized into packets or "schemata" that provide much of the basis for comprehending, learning, and remembering the ideas in stories and texts. Although many contemporary theorists are critical of the overly fixed and static nature of schema — which, they maintain, prevents schema from adequately accounting for more complex, ill-structured knowledge domains (Sadoski & Paivio, 1994; Spiro, 1994; Beach, 1993) — schema theory still has remarkable explanatory power as a general theory of cognition and reading comprehension. According to schema theory, comprehension is said to occur when the reader "is able to bring to mind a schema that gives a good account of the objects and events described in the message" (p. 469). Furthermore, what constitutes a "good account" is that it be both *complete* and *consistent*. For example, "completeness" refers to the ability of the reader to interpret every element of a sentence and to account for the *relationship* among those elements; a good interpretation is said to be "consistent" when it does not contradict the reader's existing knowledge of the physical and social world (pp. 470-471). In this way, schema theory highlights the fact that more than one interpretation of a text is possible, since each reader's schema will be culturally defined — a critical theoretical assertion when considering the virtue of an aesthetic, "lived-through" response. Also, according to schema theory, reading is conceived to be a multi-leveled (graphophonemic, morphemic, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, and interpretive), simultaneous, and interactive process.

With respect to reading and responding to literature, schema theory appears to offer significant explanatory insight into the process. Anderson (1994) lists six functions of schemata that have been proposed among schema theorists (pp. 473-474), two of which seem to be especially pertinent to this discussion. One is that schema provide the *ideational scaffolding* for assimilating text information, providing a niche or slot for such information. In responding to literature, these niches or slots might allow the reader to link ideas, actions, or character

traits to their own personal experience and world knowledge — an essential outcome of responding to literature from a predominantly "lived-through" or aesthetic stance. Another similar function of schema is that they facilitate the selective *allocation of attention,* providing part of the basis for determining the important aspects of a text. In reading and responding to literature, attention (ideally) would be predominantly allocated to those private or "lived-through" meanings which are associated with an aesthetic response (Rosenblatt, 1994).

Imagery & Affect

One of the more interesting comprehension theories to provide indirect support for reading and responding aesthetically to literature is the Dual Coding Theory of Sadoski and Paivio (1994). Presented in some ways as a more contemporary version of schema theory, this theory of cognition offers an interesting and suggestive alternative to the traditional notion of schema as it takes into account both language and mental imagery in reading comprehension.

Dual coding theory (DCT) is similar to schema theory in that it is propositionally based; that is, a referent (a word, for example) elicits or "proposes" a particular mental representation in the mind of the perceiver or reader. However, schema are generally represented as fixed abstractions, which come into existence as abstract entities separate from the specific instances , experiences, and "exemplars" that helped produce them (p. 583). DCT, on the other hand, proposes that all mental representations retain some of the original qualities of the external experiences, both linguistic and non-linguistic, from which they are derived. For example, in their discussion of the various images that can be possibly evoked by reading the phrase "swimming pool," Sadoski and Paivio note that:

> The image evoked depends on the cultural experiences of individual readers and the situation described in the text. This differs from having an overall 'swimming pool' schema in that different, experience-based exemplars are evoked with certain

> probabilities as context requires and experience allows. The DCT interpretation is simpler and more explicit [than schema], appealing to a range of situationally appropriate exemplar memories rather than to an abstracted, superordinate shell derived from such memories (Sadoski & Paivio, 1994, p. 588).

It is this "accommodative" nature of DCT, in contrast to the predominantly "assimilative" nature of schema, that accounts for the way in which all mental representations retain some of the concrete, original qualities of the external experiences from which they were derived.

And it is the concrete nature of these representations that relates significantly to the aspect of DCT most pertinent to the aesthetic stance: the nonverbal or imagery system (see Figure 2 below). In DCT, two separate yet referentially linked mental systems are proposed — the *verbal* system and the nonverbal or *imagery* system, through which our senses detect verbal and nonverbal stimuli in the environment and activate corresponding verbal and nonverbal (imagery) representations, called "logogens" and "imagens," respectively (Sadoski & Paivio, 1994, p. 584). It is DCT's explanation of the power of imagery which lends the greatest credence to the importance of the aesthetic stance in reading, for here DCT helps explain affective responses to text:

> DCT contends that affect, being nonverbal by definition, is theoretically associated with the nonverbal system and would therefore be expected to accompany nonverbal reactions such as imagery (Paivio, 1986, p. 78). In this way imagery may serve as a bridge between traditional domains of cognition and affect. That is, imagery is part of the cognitive domain, but because it is nonverbal, it is associated with the affective domain, which is also nonverbal (pp. 590-591).

It is the power of this imagery dimension, working in tandem with the verbal system — a "bridge," as it were, between cognition and affect — that most significantly supports the role of affect within the reading process. And since imagery and emotional response are assumed to be essential to an aesthetic response, the dual coding view of reading provides a useful theoretical

explanation of the way in which imagery serves a vital function in the aesthetic reading of literature.

Furthermore, Sadoski and Paivio offer significant evidence of the connection between imagery, affect, and comprehension while arguing for a Dual-Coding Theory. Citing the work of Long, Winograd, and Bridge (1989) which emphasizes the natural and spontaneous nature of imagery within the

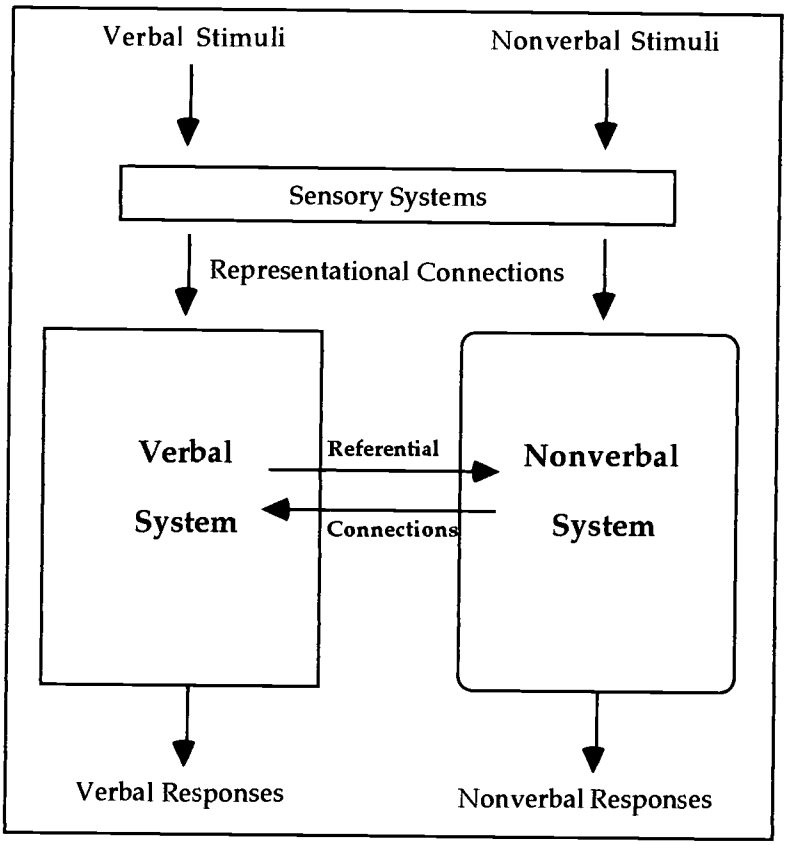


Figure 2: Featured Components of Dual Coding Theory: Verbal and Nonverbal Systems (Sadoski & Paivio, 1994)

reading process, Sadoski and Paivio (1994) reference some of their own research linking imagery to the reading of literary stories. In their studies, the researchers asked college students to report on the *degree of imagery* experienced when reading each paragraph of a text,

to rate the *importance of text paragraphs*, and to rate their *degree of emotional responses* to them:

> Both quantitative analysis of the ratings and qualitative analysis of reports of the images experienced, emotions experienced, or reasons for rating a paragraph as important indicated a parallel, nonverbal dimension to discourse processing that contributes centrally to the overall comprehension, integration, and appreciation of text (Sadoski et al., 1988; in Sadoski & Paivio, 1994, p. 618).

Results such as these clearly support the link among imagery, affect, and cognition. And as it has been suggested earlier, imagery — and its correlate, emotional response — are essential elements of aesthetic response to text.

Perhaps what is most significant to the role of the aesthetic response are research findings which suggest that a very important function of imagery may be to increase the degree of involvement, interest, and enjoyment of reading (Long, Winograd, & Bridge, 1989) — a function which invariably serves to promote active comprehension and the personal construction of meaning. Concentrating upon the *vividness* of a reader's imagery, defined in terms of its strength and clarity, these researchers conclude that vividness is an excellent predictor of aesthetic response. Here the active reader generates imagery which will in itself help promote more engagement with the text during reading. In this regard, imagery not only functions to help carry the cognitive burden of processing text, but serves also to facilitate an aesthetic response and provide a means of sustaining reading pleasure (Anderson & Rubano, 1991).

Motivation & the Intention to Read

As the study by Long, et al. (1989) above suggests, the aesthetic response functions as a means of motivating the reader and sustaining a particular reading, indicating quite clearly the value of assuming an aesthetic stance while reading literature. Similarly, Mathewson's

Model of Attitude Influence supports the motivational virtues of an aesthetic stance (Mathewson, 1994). A brief description of the model now follows, focusing primarily upon those features most salient to aesthetic reading and response.

At the core of Mathewson's model is the reader's Attitude Toward Reading, the reader's Intention To Read and continue reading, and Reading itself — including text selection, attention, strategy use, and comprehension (see Figure 3 below; for a complete representation of the model, see Appendix, p. 30). The Attitude Toward Reading component contains three important sub-components: (1) Prevailing Feelings about reading (affective component), (2) Action Readiness for reading (conative component), (3) Evaluative Beliefs about reading (cognitive component).

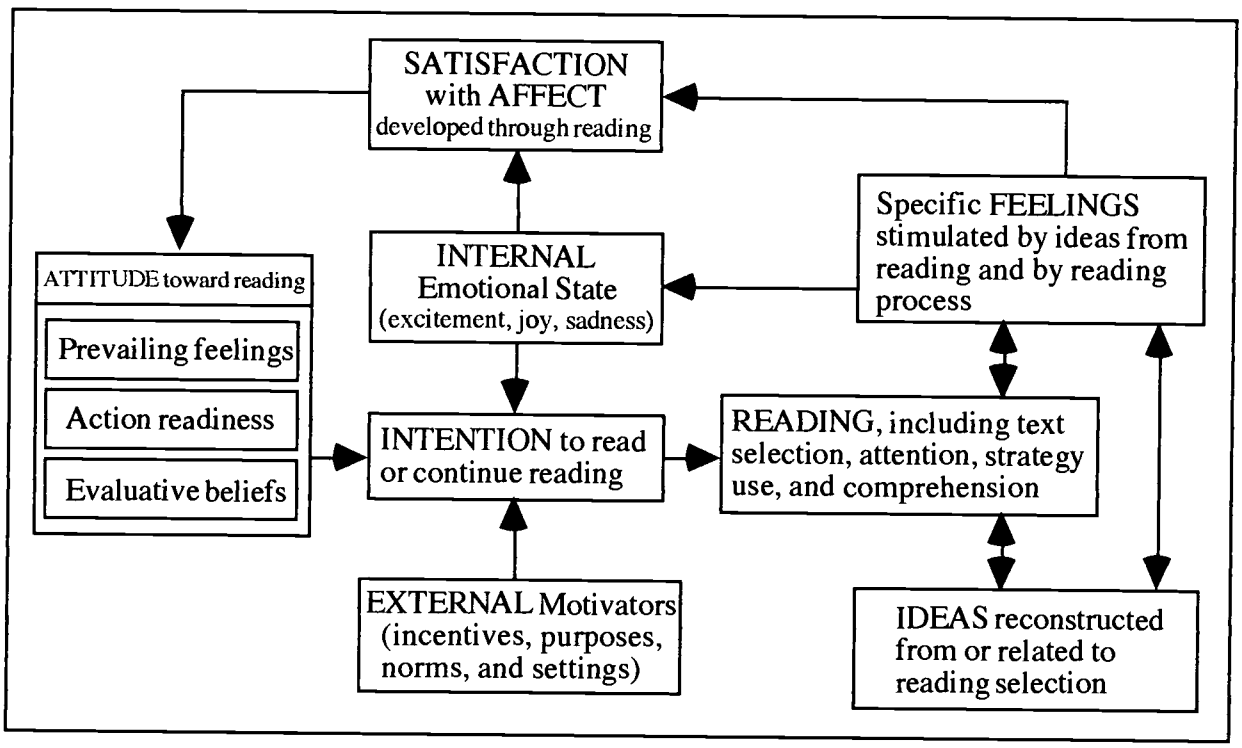


Figure 3: Featured Components of Mathewson's Model of Attitude Influence upon Reading

An aesthetic stance and response is effectively represented throughout several components of Mathewson's Model of Attitude Influence. Most notably, the assumption of an

aesthetic stance can be seen in the model's representation of the reading process itself (see right side of model above). It is here that reader stance resides, represented as "text selection" and "attention," terms which resonate positively with Rosenblatt's description of reader stance as a dynamic process of selective attention. The adoption of a particular stance, in turn, influences and is influenced by the Specific Feelings and Ideas stimulated and reconstructed from the reading — essentially the affective and cognitive components of what Rosenblatt might term the "evocation" of the literary work, the other triadic component of the transaction among the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1978; 1994).

As the right side of the diagram indicates, the Reading, Feelings, and Ideas components interact dynamically during the reading process. Notice, however, the significance given to the role of *affect* in this motivational model of reading:

> Specific feelings....are brief responses to particular textual words and sentences. These may cumulatively affect internal emotional state, and, if they are significantly strong and representative, may also affect the prevailing feelings that are part of readers' attitudes toward reading (Mathewson, 1994, p. 1145).

These "brief responses" to "specific feelings" can be considered, quite simply, forms of aesthetic response. Furthermore, such aesthetic reading and response significantly influences other major components of Mathewson's model. First, it clearly impacts the Reading process itself; having an aesthetic response to text would predict the maintenance of a predominantly aesthetic stance, affecting such things as text selection and attention, strategy use, and comprehension itself. Second, the reader's Internal Emotional State is positively influenced by these feelings as well, which in turn affects the reader's Intention to Read or continue reading. Mathewson comments upon this relationship:

> ....emotions may facilitate reading if the construction of meaning during reading is accompanied by a simultaneous construction of supportive emotion....[therefore] it is not

> hard to imagine that readers reconstruct not only authors' meanings, but their feelings also (p. 1137).

These insights into Mathewson's model are clearly suggestive of the "transactional" nature of the reading process in general (the construction of meaning involving the transaction between the reader and the text), as well as the role of aesthetic stance and response in particular in promoting a reader's intention to read and continue reading.

Another critical component in this process of aesthetic reading are the External Motivators, described by Mathewson as the "incentives, purposes, norms, and settings outside of readers that influence their intention to engage in reading activity" (p. 1136). Among these motivators which are particularly vital to assuming a predominantly aesthetic literary stance, and which are especially important to this discussion, are those reading purposes and norms — fostered and reinforced, for example, by a predominantly efferent instructional stance and assessment system — which might adversely influence a reader's intention to read and which insure an inappropriate and aesthetically unrewarding reading stance.

Lastly, a reader's Attitude toward Reading is presumably enhanced in the process of aesthetic reading. Here the Specific Feelings and the reader's Internal Emotional State are seen to influence the reader's Satisfaction with Affect developed through reading; satisfaction with this presumably aesthetic "experience" then influences the reader's Attitude toward Reading (Mathewson, 1994).

Within the Classroom Context

While Mathewson's Model of Attitude Influence Upon Reading can be helpful in conceptualizing the motivational value of an aesthetic stance, it does not account in any detail for the various situational and contextual variables which might influence the assumption of an aesthetic literary stance. The Ruddell and Unrau Model (1994), "Reading as a Meaning Construction Process: The Reader, the Text, and the Teacher," acknowledges the motivational

value of an aesthetic stance as well, yet it does so while also accounting for the various aspects of the meaning negotiation process within the classroom, portrayed as the interaction among the text, the reader, the teacher, and the classroom community. The importance of reader *and* instructional stance is reflected throughout the model's three main components: the Reader, the Teacher, and the Text & Classroom Context (see Figure 4 below; for the complete model, see Appendix, p. 31). Following is a brief description of these components as they relate to reader stance.

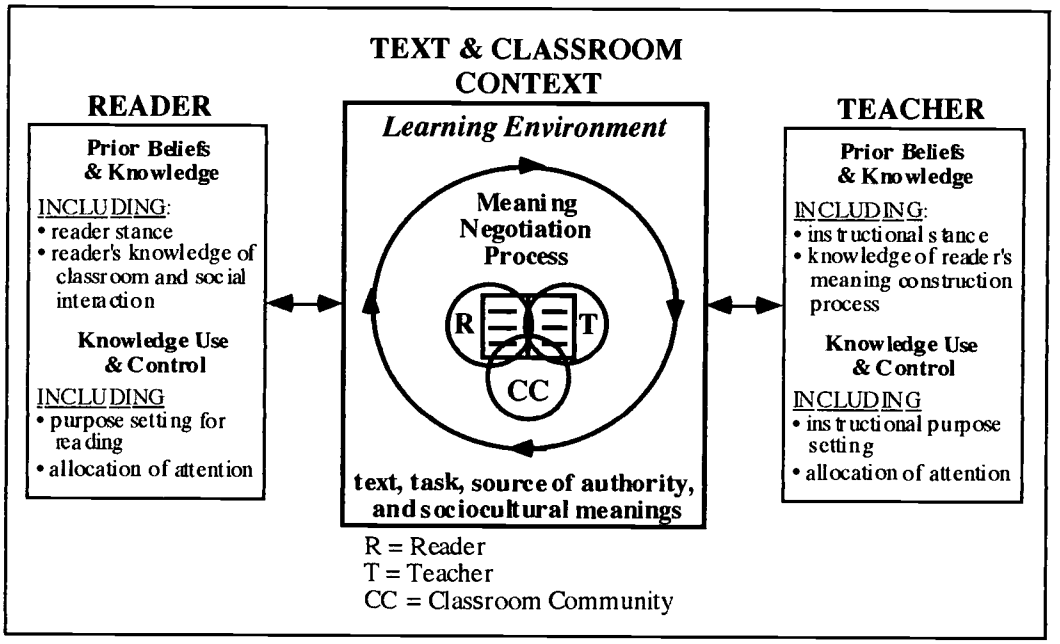


Figure 4: Adaptation of Components discussed within Reading as a Meaning Construction Process: The Reader, the Text, and the Teacher (Ruddell and Unrau, 1994)

With respect to the Reader, his or her knowledge of stance is considered an affective condition which resides within his or her Prior Beliefs and Knowledge. Adoption of a particular stance is said to be influenced by the nature of the text itself and the reader's desired interaction with the text (reflecting the reader's motivation or intent), and is represented throughout the Reader's Knowledge Use and Control. Here, the reader's stance will be

reflected within the Knowledge Construction Process (1) itself, since how knowledge is ultimately constructed will depend upon the mix of public (efferent) and private (aesthetic) meanings evoked throughout the reading process. This "mix," of course, will be dictated by the purpose setting component of the Knowledge Construction Process, since stance is said to reflect the reader's purpose (Rosenblatt, 1994). Within the Reader Executive and Monitor (2), stance is reflected in the monitor's role in allocating attention to aspects of the text, recalling Rosenblatt's description of stance as guiding the process of selective attention (Rosenblatt, 1994). Finally, Text Representation (3), "conceived of as a 'text world' that represents the text meaning structure and a record of text processing" (Ruddell & Unrau, p. 1020), will also be affected by reader stance. Although the exact nature of text representation remains unclear, it seems reasonable to assume that text representation will be affected by the assumption of an aesthetic stance, perhaps being comprised of more imagery as a result. As was shown earlier, imagery may serve several important functions within the reading process by increasing reader involvement, interest, and enjoyment (Long, Winograd, & Bridge, 1989).

However, while the assumption of stance is under the reader's control, it can clearly come under the influence of the Teacher, a key factor in understanding the significance of this model and its implications for promoting an aesthetic stance in young readers. For instance, within the Teacher's Prior Beliefs and Knowledge lies instructional stance, which "will influence the teacher's instructional objective and pedagogical approach and will, in turn, shape the reader's purpose and attention focus" (p. 1024-1025). The role of stance is reflected throughout the instructional decision making process within the Teacher's Knowledge Use and Control. Within the literature classroom, the teacher's initial purpose may be to elicit students' emotional or affective responses to a poem, short story, or novel; this decision would then result in the use of a predominantly aesthetic instructional stance, featuring strategies that would presumably result in more open-ended question prompts, designed to elicit the reader's personal feelings and attitudes (pp. 1028).

Ultimately, the reader and the teacher, calling upon their knowledge and understanding of stance (represented through their respective Prior Beliefs & Knowledge and their Knowledge Use & Control), meet in the classroom environment where they interact with the text and the classroom community. It is here that the issue of stance, and the value of an aesthetic stance in particular, is enacted. Ruddell and Unrau recognize "that meaning results from the Reader's meaning construction process. That meaning is not entirely in either the Text or the Reader, but is created as a result of the interactions among Reader, Text, Teacher, and the Classroom Community" (p. 1032). That textually driven meanings are negotiated within a classroom context is central to this sociocognitive conception of the reading process. Clarifying their classroom reading model further, they write:

> The three overlapping circles symbolize the interactive nature of the Meaning Negotiation Process for Teacher (T), Reader (R), and Classroom Community (CC). However, that process....overlaps a real text upon which the dialogue is based. Thus, the text itself is not the sole object carrying meaning; instead, meanings arise from transactions with the text (p. 1033).

As we can see, this transactive description of the classroom reading process allows for and invites a multiplicity of meanings. Such a condition could only exist in a classroom where meaning is believed to be derived among multiple authority sources. It is this balance of classroom authority which provides the greatest argument for using a predominantly aesthetic stance in the literature classroom, for it is within a predominantly aesthetic stance that a reader is most likely to respond to personal meanings. Conversely, in a classroom context where students are led to believe that meaning resides in the text or where the teacher is perceived to be the verifier of meaning and the bellwether for the "truth" of textual interpretation, meaning negotiation is unlikely to occur (Ruddell & Unrau, p. 1034). This model clearly insists upon a greater balance of reader and *instructional* stance which, in light of the current classroom

imbalance toward the "efferent" end of the continuum, argues effectively for inviting young readers to assume an aesthetic stance when reading and responding to literature.

In Sum

Taken cumulatively, these four theoretical perspectives of the reading process, varied in their relative focus and breadth, offer us a rich and patterned view of the vital role served by the aesthetic reading stance. The early contributions of schema theory highlight the importance of personal experience and world knowledge in constructing meaning through text, while Dual Coding Theory provides insight into the both cognitive *and* affective roles served by imagery within the reading process. In acknowledging the affective influences upon reading, Mathewson's model of Attitude Influence effectively addresses the motivational value of an affective or "aesthetic" response to literature, while the Ruddell & Unrau model situates this discussion of aesthetic stance within the environment of the classroom context, addressing the critical role of instructional stance in creating a classroom environment that ultimately invites an aesthetic response to literature.

PART IV: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Future Research Directions

Some of the more interesting research directions suggested by this review include several offered by Louise Rosenblatt (1994) in response to her transactional theory of reading and writing, the very theory which undergirds both the existence and value of an aesthetic stance. One of the recommendations that is most salient to this discussion pertains to teaching methods. In particular, studies are clearly needed to determine how teachers lead and facilitate literature response without dominating or dictating. Some valuable work which indirectly addresses this issue has been done in Great Britain which explores the value of fostering more "expressive" student talk, talk which is characterized as "relaxed, self-presenting, and self-revealing" and is decidedly student-centered (Barnes, Britton, & Torbe, 1990, p. 105). More specifically and more recently, research on literature response groups or "Literature Circles" (Daniels, 1995) appears to demonstrate the value of placing a premium upon "choice and voice": students must *choose* their reading material, and they must use their own *voice* in responding, emphasizing the importance of having personal responses to their reading before moving to more analytic responses.

Further research is also needed to develop a system of analysis for students' written and oral responses to literature. For example, what evidence do we have that a student's reading of a story has been predominantly aesthetic? The problem of empirical assessment of the student's aesthetic reading of text is particularly difficult since no single "correct" interpretation or evaluation can be posited. Ultimately, any assessment must be based upon clearly articulated criteria which account for a reader's growing maturity in handling personal response, relating to the evoked text, and using personal and intertextual experiences in relation to the responses of others (Rosenblatt, 1994). Recently, however, some promising work has been done in this regard. Sebesta, Monson, and Senn (1995), for example, describe a hierarchy for assessing aesthetic response in adolescent readers which can be used by teachers to assess their teaching

and by students for self-assessment. Provided that they are not used rigidly and dogmatically, development of tools like these may be extremely helpful to teachers and young readers who strive to teach and read aesthetically.

Other interesting research possibilities include investigating the aforementioned "intertextual experiences" of readers and the relationship between intertextuality and the aesthetic stance. Like their reader response counterparts, researchers in intertextuality have argued consistently for the reader's need to "make connections," not only to prior experiences in general but to other texts in particular. Within this research domain, texts are often defined more globally, referring essentially to any "chunk" of meaning (a sign or symbol) which can be shared by others — such as dance, sculpture, song, or a novel (Short, 1992). Furthermore, Hartman (1994) has defined degrees of intertextuality, linking profiles, and discourse stances which are helpful in discussing how readers engage or situate themselves within a reading activity. For example, an argument can be made that an aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1994) and an intertextual stance (Hartman, 1994) are in many ways consonant with one another insofar as each presumes some linking of the present text with either personal experience (the "lived-through" experience of an aesthetic reading) or with other texts, where "texts" are broadly conceived as both linguistic and non-linguistic signs (Harste, 1994). Such intertextual links exist both within and outside the current text — extending beyond the mere extraction of information that is characteristic of a predominantly "efferent" reading stance. Clearly, many of the findings and implications of intertextual research have exciting and rewarding parallels to reader response research and the aesthetic stance.

Implications for the Classroom

As the work of Joyce Many clearly indicates, the degree of aesthetic responses to literature — a certain indicator of a predominantly aesthetic reading stance — is regretfully low; only 33% of the adolescent readers in her study responded from a predominantly aesthetic

stance (1994, p. 664). Assuming that the aesthetic stance is the focus deemed most appropriate for the reading of literature, a point which has been echoed in the work of Rosenblatt (1978, 1994) and Squire (1994), much can be done in our literature classrooms to invite an aesthetic stance and response. Such a notion is certainly consistent with some of our most basic intuitions about the value of literature in our lives, connected as they still are to the feelings and sense of personal pleasure that first "hooked" us into reading (Nelms & Zancanella, 1990).

Squire (1994) offers ten general implications for classroom practice that provide an excellent framework from which to construct a stance-sensitive literature approach in the classroom. Three of these, I believe, are most pertinent to this discussion of the aesthetic stance and include the following:

1. *The teaching of literature must focus upon the transaction between the reader and the work — not literary history, literary biography, or literary criticism.* Denying students the opportunity to transact with the text in an aesthetically pleasing, "lived-through" manner will likely destroy their motivation to read literature. We can certainly teach elements of the author's craft, but only insofar as it deepens student's ability to respond.
2. *Response is affected by prior knowledge and experience.* First, we must know our students; only then can we most effectively help them "activate schema" that enable them to make personal connections to literature. Furthermore, we should be aware of the non-verbal dimension of such prior knowledge and should appreciate the affective power of non-verbal "texts" when designing strategies to help students respond aesthetically to literature.
3. *It takes two to read a book — response must be active and should involve writing and speaking to others.* If we indeed learn from experience, then it is the experience of *thinking* during and after reading that translates the mere activity of reading into *true* experience. Therefore, we should place a premium upon creating such experiential and reflective "thinking" opportunities to help students socially construct meaning through

expressive forms of oral or written language. This idea is comprised within most of recommendations offered by Joyce Many (1994) in the conclusion of her study, recommendations that urge teachers to use strategies to promote a more aesthetic reading stance by: (a) inviting open responses from students, (b) giving students time to respond, (c) providing opportunities to talk, (d) encouraging interpersonal and intertextual connections.

Many of these general implications are embodied within specific applications designed with adolescent readers in mind, a brief overview of which will follow.

Strategies for Promoting an Aesthetic Stance

Anderson & Rubano (1991) offer one of the best reviews of classroom strategies designed to enhance aesthetic reading and response. Within the discussion of their rationale for a greater use of the aesthetic stance, they cite the distinction between articulated and unarticulated responses that readers produce during or directly after reading a text.

Articulated Response Activities — Research on articulated response (generally called *protocol analysis*) has been relatively plentiful over the past 50 years, although the modes of response used have generally neglected the *poetic* mode of discourse response. Pertinent to this discussion of response modes is James Britton's functional model of writing which describes three general modes of discourse: (1) Expressive, (2) Transactional (not to be confused with Rosenblatt's transactional *model* of reading and writing), (3) and Poetic. (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1992). The categories are essentially distinguished by their purpose and their relative concern for audience. *Expressive* writing is for the personal use of the writer, functioning primarily as a means of generating and recording thought. *Transactional* discourse is used to communicate to an audience, where the writer assumes the psychological role of "participant" in the attempt to communicate something or accomplish a task. *Poetic* discourse, what some teachers call "creative writing," is less concerned with communicating to an

audience and is more concerned with "shaping a verbal object" while assuming the psychological role of "spectator." This spectator role assumes language use for its own sake while attempting to present a reflection or picture of that experience (Britton et al., 1992).

Using Britton's functional writing model, then, one of the best ways to ensure that students initially assume a predominantly aesthetic reading stance would be to provide for them opportunities to respond in poetic discourse, since responding in the poetic writing mode presents for students little or no teacher expectation to efferently read a literary text — the kind of reading a more transactive written response might invite — and prevents students from initially avoiding a written poetic response by writing a transactional one *first*, a tendency they will likely have when writing in the expressive mode as well (Anderson & Rubano, 1991).

Numerous activities have been developed which help students focus primarily upon responding to literature in the form of *poetic* discourse, where the instructional emphasis is upon writing literary texts rather than expository or "transactional" texts in response to literature. For while it is certainly valid to write an expository text about a poem, the mere expectation of a "transactional" response (Britton's sense of the term) may predispose the student to take a "shortcut" around an aesthetic response by reading in an efferent manner.

Imagic umbrellas represent the kind of activities which invite an aesthetic stance and which recognize that the production of imagery is a continuous and important facet of the reader's construction of meaning (Sadoski & Paivio, 1994). These activities reflect the contention that the pattern of images and emotions found in a piece of literature forms a constraining "imagic umbrella" under which the idiosyncratic images of the reader are contained. For example, rather than asking questions about plot, character, or theme, teachers can introduce a reading selection by asking students to report the images they recall after having read the piece or a portion of it. Teachers need to prompt students to report as vividly as possible, since the connection between vividness and reader interest has proven to be so significant (Long et al., 1989). Effectively using these activities demonstrates that certain

prominent images will remain with the reader and can provide a pathway for students to return to that moment or situation in the text from which the images were generated. (For a fuller discussion of articulated response activities, see Appendix, pp. 32-33)

Unarticulated Response Activities— Unarticulated response, by contrast, refers to the actual response to literature itself before it is processed and expressed through a reader's oral or written "re-creations" of the text. A problem with articulated responses, both in research and teaching, is that they may not indicate very much about the inner or "real" response, particularly for less-educated students with fewer linguistic or literary "schooling" experience and expertise. Consequently, unarticulated response techniques provide a means for students to respond when they might otherwise remain silent. Furthermore, these techniques provide an initial response from which articulated responses can develop (Anderson & Rubano, 1991).

Verbal scales, for example, offer an excellent way to capture unarticulated responses by using a "semantic differential" as a yardstick for response. Scales can be either bipolar (Bright 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dark) or unipolar (0 1 2 3 4 5 Strong) and can be used repeatedly throughout a literary text, allowing students to record patterns of response throughout the work and to chart any changes over time (for a fuller discussion of this and other activities, see Appendix, pp. 34-35). Such scales provide the reader with an excellent way to use the non-verbal, imagery-rich dimensions of their affective responses to text, which ought to serve as an excellent motivational bridge (Sadoski & Paivio, 1994) to the more cognitive activity of speaking and writing about literature.

Conclusion

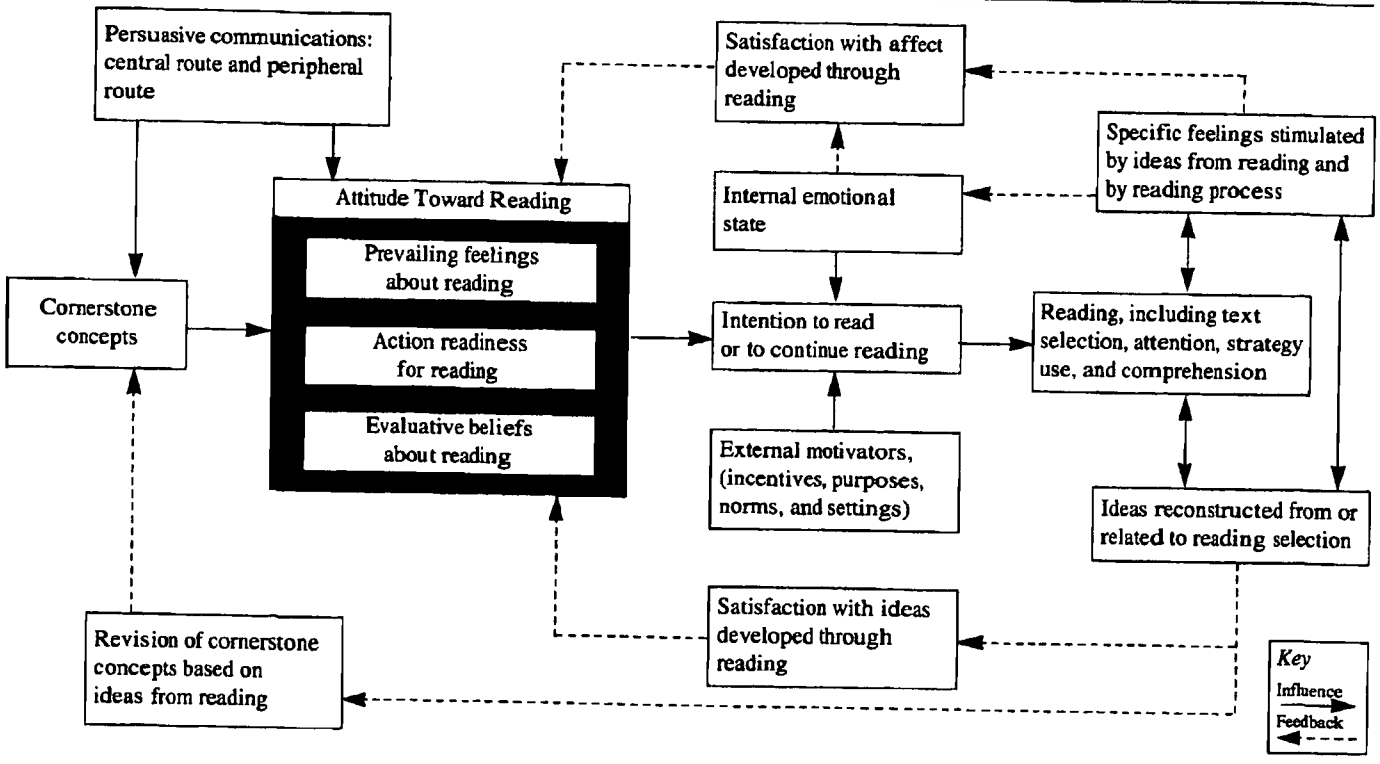
In this paper I have attempted to explore both the nature of an aesthetic reading stance and its significance to the reading *and* teaching of literature. While many questions about reader response theories and their appropriate application remain, what should be clear from this discussion is that the concept of reader stance — and the assumption of an aesthetic

literary stance in particular — has a sound basis in theory as it continues to engender rich implications for both response-based research and classroom practice.

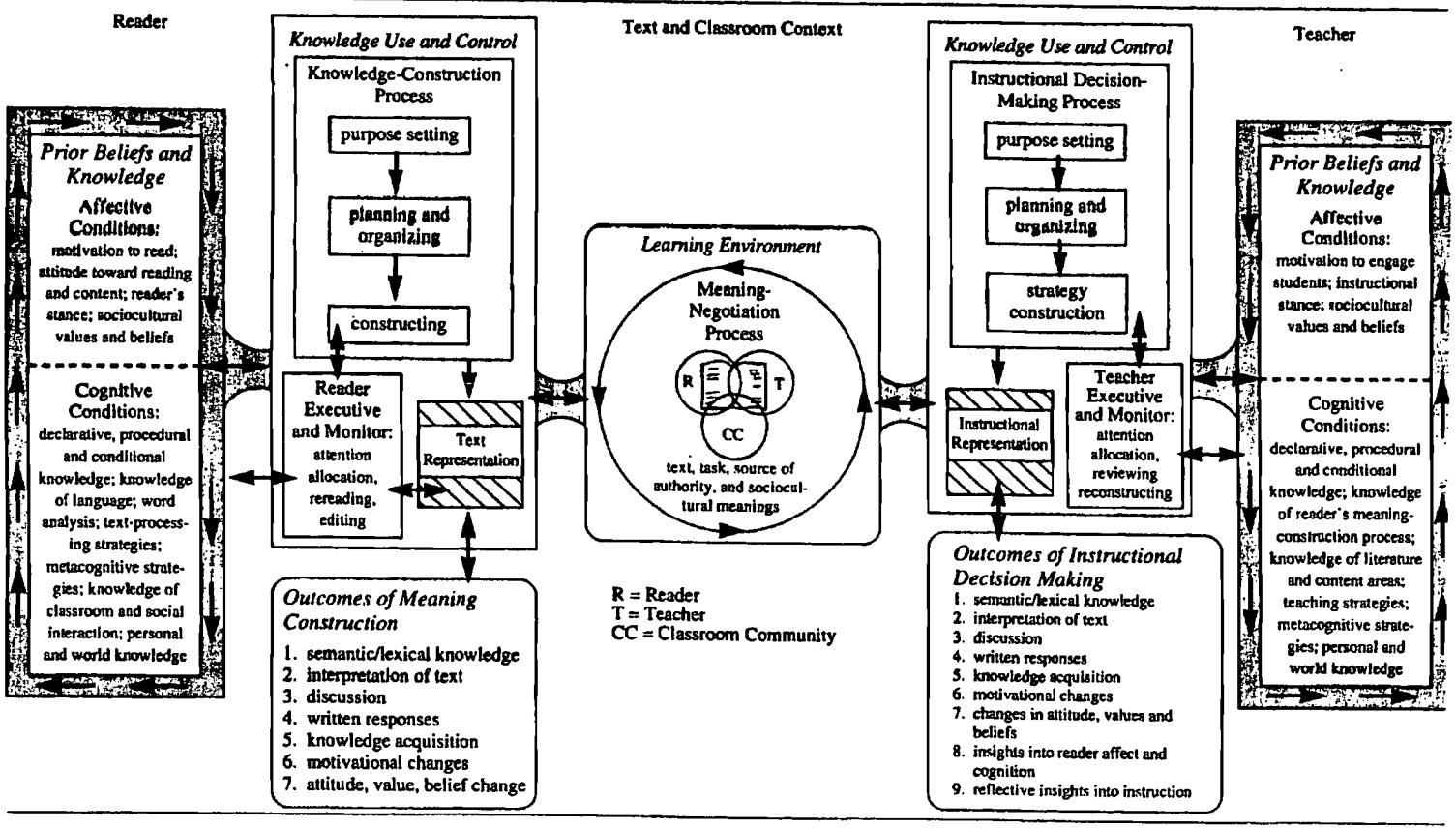
The words of Alan Purves (1985), I believe, assist wonderfully in concluding this discussion of aesthetic stance and response. In his description of the three main sources of variation within reader response — texts, readers, and contexts — he speaks extensively of a "web of connectedness and dispersion" which characterizes response to literature, expressing eloquently the tension between the reader's individual experience and his or her need to communicate and to be a part of an "interpretive" community. Purves continues by emphasizing the "harmony" of these seemingly opposing tensions this way: "That harmony, which necessarily contains tension, lives at the heart of literature and of research into the tension that is response to literature" (pp. 68-69). However, such harmony is currently lacking in our literature classrooms, where personal experience through aesthetic response is losing to the dominance of the efferent stance and strictly "public" meanings. Helping our students to assume an aesthetic stance promises to create a more balanced "tension" and lead to a more personally rewarding and harmonious literary experience for our students.

And regardless of how convincing this discussion of reader stance might be, these ideas alone certainly will not magically alter the literature classroom by themselves. Other curricular and pedagogical issues — as well as larger social, cultural, and political concerns — militate against any swift transformations. However, the implications of these research and curricular developments can not be ignored if literature is to remain both a viable *and* a vital component of any language arts curriculum.

Model of Attitude Influence upon Reading and Learning to Read



Reading as a Meaning-Construction Process: The Reader, the Text, and the Teacher



Other Articulated Response Activities

Dependent authorship activities (Anderson & Rubano, 1991) also use poetic discourse as the primary form of written response. These response approaches consist of removing pieces from a literary text with students then supplying their own replacements. In this scenario, students are given text as their starting point, and their creative response is within the structure established by the original author of the text. This approach is recommended for use with prose, but it can also be used judiciously with poetry. It also overlaps into the territory of unarticulated response (namely, literary cloze techniques), yet it may be the best way to begin student authorship. For instance, you can start by making a poem into a "cloze test" by removing individual words at various intervals.

Poetry as response to poetry and prose (Anderson & Rubano, 1991) is generally introduced as part of a situational possibility in the text. Most of the time, the best situation for the poetry is as part of a character's representation of his or her condition. Many of these poetic responses can be unguided and can be assigned without prompts or formats to guide their production; however, it is best to discourage students from rhyme because of the difficulty of maintaining tone within restraining rhyme considerations. Following is an example of a prompt used with a short story:

> Sherwood Anderson's "Lift Up Thine Eyes" is a short story which attacks the dehumanizing effect of mass production upon the workers. In the Bogel factory, the belt is God. Precision, cleanliness, and calculation are servants of the new religion of efficiency. On occasion, a worker becomes deranged, a victim of the stress.
>
> *Assignment* — Write a poem that might have fallen from the pocket of such a worker.

However, poetry as response can be guided by the teacher as well, providing focus and/or method to the activity. For example, teachers can add depth to student responses about the feelings and reactions of characters by having them write a poem, the last line of which is taken from the text itself; the best quotations are those which suggest a change or

transformation of character. After discussing the contraries or "appearance/reality" contrasts implied in the verse (common in a vast number of poems), students are then told to produce the lines of text preceding the quotation that will reveal the previous and/or present condition of the character. Other directions might include line and stanza requirements; similarly, the teacher and the class could complete the first line or two together so as to make clear what is expected. Following is an example of a guided poetic response activity using a line from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

> ***Possible last line:*** "O, full of scorpions is my mind, my dear wife." (*Macbeth*, III, ii, 36)
>
> ***Possible Format:***
>
> Once, the wind played among the branches of the trees.
> Now, _____
> Once, _____
> Now, _____
> Once, _____
> Now, _____
> Once, _____
> Now, _____
> "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife."

Unarticulated Response Activities

Altering text, verbal scales, choosing critical questions, and literary cloze techniques are among several excellent activities designed to tap unarticulated aesthetic responses (Anderson & Rubano, 1991). **Altering text** involves providing students with more than one version of a literary text for comparison, the criteria for which is established by the teacher. After reading the different versions of the text, students may be asked, for example, to pick the best, the worst, the saddest, or the funniest version(s). **Verbal scales** offer yet another way to capture unarticulated responses by using a "semantic differential" as a yardstick for response. Scales can be either bipolar (Bright 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Dark) or unipolar (0 1 2 3 4 5 Strong) and can be used repeatedly throughout a literary text, allowing students to record patterns of response throughout the work and to chart any changes over time. The following poem, *Richard Cory,* demonstrates how such a scale might be used:

Richard Cory
by Edwin Arlington Robinson

Whenever Richard Cory went down town,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored and imperially slim.

How do you feel toward Richard Cory?
Like 1 2 3 4 5 Dislike
Admire 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said,
"Good morning," and he glittered when he walked.

How do you feel toward Richard Cory?
Like 1 2 3 4 5 Dislike
Admire 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

And he was rich — yes, richer than a king —
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

How do you feel toward Richard Cory?

Like 1 2 3 4 5 Dislike

Admire 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

How do you feel toward Richard Cory?

Like 1 2 3 4 5 Dislike

Admire 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Verbal scales such as these could easily be incorporated into various stop points in a short story or at the conclusion of a chapter in a novel, and can serve to focus the reader's response upon particular characters, images, or events.

Choosing critical questions asks readers to choose from among a set of critical questions the ones they thought were the most important to ask about a particular text. Since students will have chosen from a variety of question types (for example — literal, inferential, literary theory, biographical, personal preference), they will have to reflect upon the aesthetic experience of the text and the purpose in reading it. Discussing their rationale in choosing certain questions permits an examination of the nature of literature and reading; essentially, the activity raises aesthetic issues.

Literary cloze techniques take several forms, one of which involves providing students with a poem disassembled into an alphabetized list of words. Having presumably read the poem in its original form, the students create (or reconstruct) a poem from the list of words. In reassembling the poem, the students construct meaning through language as they construct an "aesthetic" object.

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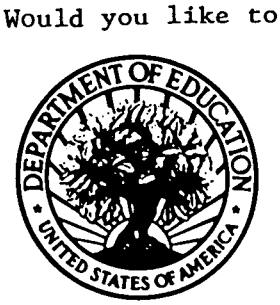

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