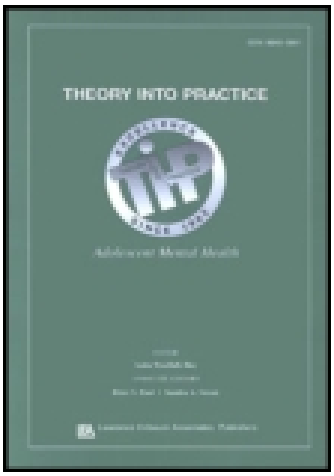

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The literary transaction: Evocation and response

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The Literary Transaction: Evocation and Response

The term *response* seems firmly established in the vocabulary of the theory, criticism, and teaching of literature. Perhaps I should feel some satisfaction at the present state of affairs since I am sometimes referred to as the earliest exponent of what is termed *reader-response* criticism or theory.[1] Yet the more the term is invoked, the more concerned I become over the diffuseness of its usage. In the days when simply to talk about the reader's response was considered practically subversive, it would undoubtedly have been premature to demand greater precision in the use of the term. Now that the importance of the reader's role is becoming more and more widely acknowledged, it seems essential to differentiate some of the aspects of the reading event that are frequently covered by the broad heading of "response."

Response implies an object. "Response to what?" is the question. There must be a story or a poem or a play to which to respond. Few theories of reading today view the literary work as ready-made in the text, waiting to imprint itself on the blank tape of the reader's mind. Yet, much talk about response seems to imply something like that, at least so fr as assuming the text to be all-important in determining whether the result will be, say, an abstract factual statement or a poem. Unfortunately, important though the text is, a story or a poem does not come into being simply because the text contains a narrative or the lines indicate rhythm and rhyme. Nor is it a matter simply of the reader's ability to give lexical meaning to the words.

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In order to deal with my assigned topic, it becomes necessary, therefore, to sketch some elements of my view of the reading process,[2] to suggest some aspects of what happens when reader meets text. (Note that although I refer mainly to reading, I shall be defining processes that apply generally to encounters with either spoken or written symbols.) This will require consideration of the nature of language, especially as manifested in early childhood. Only then shall I venture to develop some implications concerning children, literature, and response.

The Reading Process and the Reader's Stance

Reading is a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances. I use John Dewey's term, transaction, to emphasize the contribution of both reader and text. The words in their particular pattern stir up elements of memory, activate areas of consciousness. The reader, bringing past experience of language and of the world to the task, sets up tentative notions of a subject, of some framework into which to fit the ideas as the words unfurl. If the subsequent words do not fit into the framework, it may have to be revised, thus opening up new and further possibilities for the text that follows. This implies a constant series of selections from the multiple possibilities offered by the text and their synthesis into an organized meaning.

But the most important choice of all must be made early in the reading event—the overarching choice of what I term the reader's stance, his "mental set," so to speak. The reader may be seeking information, as in a textbook; he may want direc-

tions for action, as in a driver's manual; he may be seeking some logical conclusion, as in a political article. In all such reading he will narrow his attention to building up the meanings, the ideas, the directions to be retained; attention focuses on accumulating what is to be carried away at the end of the reading. Hence I term this stance *efferent*, from the Latin word meaning "to carry away."

If, on the other hand, the reader seeks a story, a poem, a play, his attention will shift inward, will center on what is being created *during* the actual reading. A much broader range of elements will be allowed to rise into consciousness, not simply the abstract concepts that the words point to, but also what those objects or referents stir up of personal feelings, ideas, and attitudes. The very sound and rhythm of the words will be attended to. Out of these ideas and feelings, a new experience, the story or poem, is shaped and lived through. I call this kind of reading *aesthetic*, from the Greek word meaning "to sense" or "to perceive." Whether the product of the reading will be a poem, a literary work of art, depends, then, not simply on the text but also on the stance of the reader.

I am reminded of the first grader whose teacher told the class to learn the following verses:

In fourteen hundred and ninety-two
Columbus crossed the ocean blue.

When called on the next day, the youngster recited:

In fourteen hundred and ninety-three
Columbus crossed the bright blue sea.

Questioned as to why she had changed it, she simply said she liked it better that way.

I submit that this represents a problem in stance. The teacher had wanted her to read efferently, in order to retain the date "1492." The pupil had read aesthetically, paying attention to the qualitative effect, to her own responses, not only to the image of the ship crossing the sea, but also to the sound of the words in her ear, and in this instance the discomfort evidently occasioned by the reversal of the normal adjective-noun order.

Freeing ourselves from the notion that the text dictates the stance seems especially difficult, precisely because the experienced reader carries out many of the processes automatically or subconsciously. We may select a text because it suits our already chosen, efferent or aesthetic, purposes. Or we note clues or cues in the text—the author announces the intention to explain or convince, for example, and we adopt the appropriate efferent stance. Or we note broad margins and uneven lines, and automatically fall into the stance that will enable us to create and experience a poem.

Any text, however, can be read either way. We may approach novels as sociological documents, efferently seeking to accumulate evidence concerning, say, the treatment of children in the 19th century. The "pop" poet may select a "job wanted" advertisement, arrange its phrases in separate lines, and thus signal us to read it aesthetically, to experience its human meaning, as a poem. Sometimes, of course, readers adopt an inappropriate attitude—for example, reading a political article aesthetically when they should be efferently paying attention to facts. And many people, alas, read the texts of stories and poems efferently.

Recognizing that the reader's stance inevitably affects what emerges from the reading does not deny the importance of the text in the transaction. Some texts offer greater rewards than do others. A Shakespeare text, say, offers more potentialities for an aesthetic reading than one by Longfellow. We teachers know, however, that one cannot predict which text will give rise to the better evocation — the better lived-through poem—without knowing the other part of the transaction, the reader.

Sometimes the text gives us confusing clues. I'm reminded of a letter a colleague received. "Dear Professor Baldwin," it began, "You will forgive my long silence when you learn about the tragedy that has befallen me. In June, my spouse departed from the conjugal domicile with a gentleman of the vicinity." The first sentence announces that we should adopt an aesthetic stance. The second would be appropriate in a legal brief, since the vocabulary seems adapted to an impersonal, efferent stance.

Any reading event falls somewhere on the continuum between the aesthetic and the efferent poles; between, for example, a lyric poem and a chemical formula. I speak of a *predominantly* efferent stance, because according to the text and the reader's purpose, some attention to qualitative elements of consciousness may enter. Similarly, aesthetic reading involves or includes referential or cognitive elements. Hence, the importance of the reader's *selective* attention in the reading process.

We respond, then, to what we are calling forth in the transaction with the text. In extreme cases it may be that the transaction is all-of-a-piece, so to speak. The efferent reader of the directions for first aid in an accident may be so completely absorbed in the abstract concepts of the actions ad-

vised that nothing else will enter consciousness. Or an aesthetic reader may be so completely absorbed in living through a lyric poem or may so completely identify with a character in a story that nothing else enters consciousness. But in most reading there is not only the stream of choices and syntheses that construct meaning; there is also a stream of accompanying reactions to the very meaning being constructed. For example, in reading a newspaper or a legal document, the "meaning" will be constructed, and there will be an accompanying feeling of acceptance or doubt about the evidence cited or the logical argument.

In aesthetic reading, we respond to the very story or poem that we are evoking during the transaction with the text. In order to shape the work, we draw on our reservoir of past experience with people and the world, our past inner linkage of words and things, our past encounters with spoken or written texts. We listen to the sound of the words in the inner ear; we lend our sensations, our emotions, our sense of being alive, to the new experience which, we feel, corresponds to the text. We participate in the story, we identify with the characters, we share their conflicts and their feelings.

At the same time there is a stream of responses being generated. There may be a sense of pleasure in our own creative activity, an awareness of pleasant or awkward sound and movement in the words, a feeling of approval or disapproval of the characters and their behavior. We may be aware of a contrast between the assumptions or expectations about life that we brought to the reading and the attitudes, moral codes, social situations we are living through in the world created in transaction with the text.

Any later reflection on our reading will therefore encompass all of these elements. Our response will have its beginnings in the reactions that were concurrent with the evocation, with the lived-through experience. Thus an organized report on, or articulation of, our response to a work involves mainly efferent activity as we look back on the reading event—an abstracting and categorizing of elements of the aesthetic experience, and an ordering and development of our concurrent reactions.

I have tried briefly to suggest some major aspects of my view of the reading process—reading as basically a transaction between the reader and the text; the importance of the reader's selective attention to what is aroused in consciousness through intercourse with the words of the text; the need to adopt a predominant stance to guide the process of selection and synthesis; the construction of efferent meaning or the participation in aesthetic evocation; the current of reactions to the very ideas and experiences being evoked. To develop the capacity for such activities is the aim of "the teaching of reading and literature." We shall find support and clarification in going on to consider children's early entrance into language and into literature. It will then perhaps be possible to arrive at some implications for desirable emphasis in the child's early transactions with texts.

Entrance into Language

The transactional view of the human being in a two-way, reciprocal relationship with the environment is increasingly reflected in current psychology, as it frees itself from the constrictions of behaviorism.[3] Language, too, is less and less being considered as "context-free."[4] Children's sensorimotor exploration of the physical environment and their interplay with the human and social environment are increasingly seen as sources and conditions of language behavior. During the prelinguistic period, the child is "learning to mean,"[5] learning the functions of language through developing a personal sound-system for communicating with others before assimilating the linguistic code of the social environment.

Recent research on children's early language supports William James's dynamic picture of the connection among language, the objects and relations to which it refers, and the internal states associated with them—sensations, images, percepts and concepts, feelings of quality, feelings of tendency. James says, "The stream of consciousness matches [the words] by an inward coloring of its own. . . . We ought to say a feeling of *and*, a feeling of *if*, a feeling of *but*, and a feeling of *by*, quite as readily as we say a feeling of *blue* or a feeling of *cold*."[6]

Werner and Kaplan, in their study of symbol formation, show us the child at first internalizing such "a primordial matrix" of sensations and postural and imaginal elements. The child's early vocables "are evoked by total happenings and are expressive not only of reference to an event external to the child," but also of "the child's attitudes, states, reactions, etc."[7] Evidence of this early sense of words as part of total happenings is the fact that some children at five years of age may still believe that the name is an inherent part of the

referent. *Cat* at first is as much an attribute of the creature as its fur or pointed ears. Thus, in language as in experience in general, the child is faced with the need for a process of differentiation of perception.[8] The child's movement toward conventional linguistic forms entails a sorting out of these various elements.

Werner and Kaplan describe the sorting-out process as an "inner-dynamic or form-building" or "schematizing" activity. Acquisition of language is a "twin process," they show us, because the child must learn to link the same internal, organismic state both to the sense of an external referent or object, on the one hand, and to a symbolic or linguistic vehicle, on the other. What links a word, cat, to its referent, the animal, is their connection with the same internal state.

Bates similarly sees the emergence of symbols as "the selection process, the choice of one aspect of a complex array to serve as the top of the iceberg, a light-weight mental token" that can stand for the whole "mental file drawer" of associations and can be used for higher-order cognitive operations.[9] In other words, the child learns to abstract from the total context in order to arrive at a generalized concept of "cat."

This process of decontextualization is, of course, essential to the development of the ability to think, to apply the symbol to new contexts and situations. The "mental token" is the public meaning of the word. Understandably, parents and schools welcome and foster this phase. But much less attention has been paid to the broad base of "the iceberg" of meaning.[10] "The sense of a word," Vygotsky reminds us, "is the sum of all the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word. It is a dynamic, fluid, complex whole. . . . The dictionary meaning of a word is no more than a stone in the edifice of sense. . . ."[11] Along with the cognitive abstraction from past experiences which is the public meaning of the word, there are the private kinesthetic and affective elements that comprise the complex, fluid matrix in which language is anchored.

The Literary Transaction

The connection can now be made with the view of the reading process that I have sketched. The role of selective attention in the two kinds of reading becomes apparent. In predominantly efferent reading, the child must learn to focus on extracting the public meaning of the text. Attention must be given mainly to the "token" top-of-the-inner-iceberg, to organizing the abstract concepts the verbal symbols point to. These can yield the information, the directions, the logical conclusions that will be the residue of the reading act.

In aesthetic reading, the child must learn to draw on more of the experiential matrix. Instead of looking outward mainly to the public referents, the reader must include the personal, the qualitative, kinesthetic, sensuous inner resonances of the words. Hence attention is turned toward what is immediately lived-through in transaction with the text, toward what is being shaped as the story or the poem.

Both efferent reading and aesthetic reading should be taught. If I concentrate on aesthetic reading, it is not only because our interest here today is in children and literature, but also because it is the kind of reading most neglected in our schools.

Contrary to the general tendency to think of the efferent, the "literal," as primary, the child's earliest language behavior seems closest to a primarily aesthetic approach to experience. The poet, Dylan Thomas, told a friend, "When I experience anything, I experience it as a thing and as a word at the same time, both amazing."[12] Such a bond between language and the inner experiential matrix continues to be stressed in recent studies of children's early language. Words are primarily aspects of sensed, felt, lived-through experiences:

> Beginning about the last quarter of the first year and continuing through the second, increased differentiations of self and other, the sharpening of self-awareness and the self-concept, and the ability to form and store memories enable the infant to begin the development of affective-cognitive structures, the linking or bonding of particular affects or patterns of affects with images and symbols, including words and ideas. . . .
>
> Since there is essentially an infinite variety of emotion-symbol interactions, affective-cognitive structures are far and away the predominant motivational features in consciousness soon after the acquisition of language.[13]

Dorothy White, in her classic diary of her child's introduction to books before age five, documents the transactional character of language. She notes how, at age two, experience feeds into language, and how language helps the child to handle further experience.

> The experience makes the book richer and the book enriches the personal experience even at this level. I am astonished at the early age this backward and forward flow between books and life takes place. With adults or older children one cannot observe it so easily, but here at this age when all a child's experiences are known and the books read are shared, when the voluble gabble which is her speech reveals all the associations, the interaction is seen very clearly. Now and again Carol mystifies me with a reference to life next door, or with some transposed pronunciation which defeats me, but on the whole I know her frame of reference.[14]

White also illustrates the private facet of the child's acquisition of the public language. Having observed the actual experiences that fed into the child's words, the mother realizes that she understands the child's particular meanings and emphasis on words that even the father cannot grasp. Of course, it is such private overtones that we all draw on in our aesthetic reading.

Parents and teachers have generally recognized signs of the young child's affinity for the aesthetic stance. Joseph Conrad tells us that the aim of the novelist is "to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see."[15] Children enthralled by hearing or reading a story or a poem often give various nonverbal signs of such immediacy of experience. They delightedly sway to the sound and rhythm of words; their facial expressions reveal sensitivity to tone; their postural responses and gestures imitate the actions being described. That they are often limited by lack of knowledge, by immature cognitive strategies, in no way contradicts the fact that they are living through aesthetic experiences, their attention focused on what, in their transaction with the words, they can see and hear and feel.

A most eloquent verbal sign that the story or poem is being aesthetically experienced is the child's "Read it again." White's account of her daughter's "voluble gabble" as stories are read testifies that a relaxed, receptive atmosphere, with no questions or requirements, is conducive to children's verbal expressions of that second stream of reactions to the work that is the source of "responses." White's book shows a child, even before age five, offering various kinds of verbal signs of aesthetic listening — questions, comments, comparisons with life experiences and with other stories, rejection because the story puzzles or frightens, or because it offers no links with the child's past experiences.

When an adolescent girl calls the story of a wallflower at her first dance "the greatest tragedy I have ever read" we must recognize that this is a sign of the intensity of the lived-through transaction with the text, and not a judgment on the relative potentialities of this book and, say, *King Lear*. This transactional process is especially demonstrated in early reading and listening to stories. White tells of reading to her three-year-old the story of a small boy who wakes one morning to find himself the sole inhabitant of his town. White remarks:

> All this to an older child might well represent a delirium of joy and liberty, but to Carol, whose pleasure is the presence of people, not their absence, it was stark tragedy. "He's all by himself," she said, overcome and deeply mournful. Paul's isolation obviously wounded and shocked her, but I had the feeling that in creating this dismay, the book provided her with the most tremendous emotional experience she has known in all her reading. However, here's the rub, this emotional experience was of a kind totally different from anything the author had planned to provide, for planned he had.[16]

The author, she points out, may plan a particular book, but "one cannot plan what children will take from it."

Understanding the transactional nature of reading would correct the tendency of adults to look only at the text and the author's presumed intention, and to ignore as irrelevant what the child actually does make of it. As in the instance just cited, it may be that the particular experience or preoccupations the child brings to the spoken or printed text permit some one part to come most intensely alive. Let us not brush this aside in our eagerness to do justice to the total text or to put that part into its proper perspective in the story. It is more important that we reinforce the child's discovery that texts can make possible such intense personal experience. Other stories, continued reading, the maturation of cognitive powers, will contribute to the habit of attending to the entire text or organizing the sequence of episodes into a whole. We have the responsibility first of all to develop the habit and the capacity for aesthetic reading. Responsibility to the total text and the question of

"the author's intention" comes later — with all the indeterminacy of meaning that implies.[17]

The notion that first the child must "understand" the text cognitively, efferently, before it can be responded to aesthetically is a rationalization that must be rejected. Aesthetic reading, we have seen, is not efferent reading with a layer of affective associations added on later. (I call this the "jam on bread" theory of literature.) Rather, we have seen that the aesthetic stance, in shaping what is understood, produces a meaning in which cognitive and affective, referential and emotive, denotational and connotational, are intermingled. The child may listen to the sound, hear the tone of the narrative "voice," evoke characters and actions, feel the quality of the event, without being able to analyze or name it. Hence the importance of finding ways to insure that an aesthetic experience has happened, that a story or a poem has been lived-through, before we hurry the young listener or reader into something called "response." This is often largely an efferent undertaking to paraphrase, summarize, or categorize. Evocation should precede response.

Maintaining Aesthetic Capacity

Why, if the capacities for aesthetic experience are so amply provided at the outset of the child's linguistic development, do we encounter in our schools and in our adult society such a limited recourse to the pleasures of literature? We cannot take the easy route of blaming television for this, since it was a problem already lamented at least 50 years ago.

One tendency is to assume a natural developmental loss of aesthetic capacity, or at the least, interest, as the child grows older. We often still share Wordsworth's romantic view that "Shades of the prison-house begin to close/Upon the growing boy."[18] Some believe that in the early school years children become mainly concerned with the "real" and reject "the worlds of the imaginative and the fantastic." This idea, and confusion of the aesthetic stance with the fictive, with the imaginative or fantasy, may have contributed to the neglect of literature in the middle years.

The child's problem of delimiting the objects and the nature of the real world may at a certain stage foster a preoccupation with clarifying the boundary between reality and fantasy. But distrust of fantasy should not be equated with rejection of aesthetic experience. Literary works representing "real" events and "real" people can be read with all the sensuous, kinesthetic, imaginative richness that are applied to fantasy. Imagination is needed also in cognitive processes, in the process of remembering, in thinking of the past, in thinking of alternative solutions to a problem. Again, we need to see that the reader's stance transcends the distinction between the real and the fictive.

The obvious question, in all such developmental generalization, is—to what extent are the changes observed due to innate factors and to what extent are they the result of environmental influences? Fortunately, an ethnographic emphasis is beginning to be valued in contemporary research on the teaching of English,[19] and I should wish only to broaden its purview. Hence the question: to what extent does the emphasis in our culture on the primarily practical, technical, empirical, and quantitative contribute to the reported loss of aesthetic receptivity as the child grows older? Why do we find teachers at every level, from the early years through high school and college, seeming always to be having to start from scratch in teaching poetry?

The fact of the great diversity of the cultures evolved by human beings is in itself testimony to the power of the environment into which the child is born. Anthropologists are making us aware of how subtle signals from adults and older children are assimilated by the infant. "In depth" studies of child-rearing and particular customs or rituals document the complexity of the individual's assimilation to his culture.[20] All who are concerned about education and children have a responsibility to interpret this process to our society, and to be actively critical of the negative aspects of our culture. Just as the medical profession is helping us relate our physical health to general environmental and cultural conditions, so we as professionals need to emphasize the importance of the child's general social, economic, and intellectual environment both outside and in the school.

A nurturing environment that values the whole range of human achievements, the opportunity for stimulating experiences, cultivation of habits of observation, opportunities for satisfying natural curiosity about the world, a sense of creative freedom—all of these lay the foundation for linguistic development. Reading, we know, is not an encapsulated skill that can be added on like a splint to an arm. If I have dwelt so long on the organismic basis of all language, it is because reading draws on the whole person's past transactions with the environment. Reading, especially aesthetic reading, ex-

tends the scope of that environment and feeds the growth of the individual, who can then bring a richer self to further transactions with life and literature. We must at least indicate awareness of broader underlying societal or cultural needs before we go on to talk about the teaching of reading, and especially the teaching of literature, the kind of reading our economy-minded school boards often consider elitist and dispensable.

In my sketch of the child's acquisition of the environing language system, I presented as a natural and desirable development the selective process by which the child detaches a sense of the public meaning of a verbal symbol from its personal organismic matrix. But in our society the emphasis, at home and at school, is almost entirely on that decontextualizing, abstracting process. Parents quite rightly welcome the child's abstracting-out of words so that they can be applied to other instances of the same category and be used in new situations. Of course, the child needs to participate in the public, referential linguistic system. Of course, the child needs to distinguish between what the society considers "real" and what fantasy. Of course, the rational, empirical, scientific, logical components of our culture should be transmitted.

Nevertheless, are these aptitudes not being fostered — or at least favored — at the expense of other potentialities of the human being and of our culture? The quality of education in general is being diluted by neglect of, sacrifice of, the rich organismic, personal, experiential source of both efferent and aesthetic thinking. Is there not evidence of the importance of the affective, the imaginative, the fantasizing activities even for the development of cognitive abilities and creativity in all modes of human endeavor?

Throughout the entire educational process, the child in our society seems to be receiving the same signal: adopt the efferent stance. What can be quantified — the most public of efferent modes — becomes often the guide to what is taught, tested, or researched. In the teaching of reading, and even of literature, failure to recognize the importance of the two stances seems to me to be at the root of much of the plight of literature today.

One of the most troubling instances of the confusion of stances is the use of stories to teach efferent reading skills. Is it not a deception to induce the child's interest through a narrative and then, in the effort to make sure it has been (literally, efferently) "understood," to raise questions that imply that only an efferent reading was necessary? Even more disconcerting is the neglect of the aesthetic stance when the declared aim is "the teaching of literature," when stories and poems are presented, not as exercises for reading skills, but presumably for their value as literature, for their capacity to present images of life, to entertain, to deal with human situations and problems, to open up vistas of different personalities and different milieus. Here, too, the concern in most classes still seems to be first of all with the kinds of response that can be met by efferent reading. Questions often ask for highly specific factual details — What did the boy do, where did he go, what did he see, what does this word mean? At the other extreme is the tendency to nudge the young reader toward a labeling, a generalization, a paraphrase, a summary that again requires an abstracting analytic approach to what has been read. Repeated questions of that sort soon teach the young reader to approach the next texts with an efferent stance. Studies of students' responses to literature have revealed the extent to which in a seemingly open situation the young reader will respond in ways already learned from the school environment.[21] The results of the 1979-80 National Assessment of Reading and Literature demonstrate that the traditional teacher-dominated teaching of literature, with its emphasis on approved or conventional interpretations, does not produce many readers capable of handling their initial responses or relating them to the text. Questions calling for traditional analyses of character or theme, for example, reveal such shallowness of response.

Educators and psychologists investigating children's aesthetic activities and development reflect a similar tendency to focus on the efferent—a legacy, perhaps, from the hegemony of traditional behaviorist experimental research methodology. Investigations of children's use of metaphor seem often actually to be testing children's cognitive metalinguistic abilities. Studies of the "grammar" of story tend also to eliminate the personal aesthetic event and to center on the cognitive ability to abstract out its narrative structure. Stories or poems can thus become as much a tool for studying the child's advance through the Piagetian stages of cognitive or analytic thinking as would a series of history texts or science texts.

Implications for Teaching

What, then, are the implications for teaching? The view of language and the reading process I

have sketched demonstrates the importance of the early years for the development of adult readers able to share in the pleasures and benefits of literature. The theoretical positions I have sketched apply, I believe, throughout the entire educational span, from the beginning reader to the adult critic. At every stage, of course, knowledge of students and books is essential to the sound application of any theoretical guidelines. At best, I can only suggest criteria for differentiating between potentially counterproductive or fruitful practices. I shall undoubtedly only be offering theoretical support for what many sensitive teachers are already doing.

A reading stance is basically an expression of purpose. Children will read efferently in order to arrive at some desired result, some answer to a question, some explanation of a puzzling situation, some directions as to procedures to be followed in an interesting activity.

Aesthetic reading, by its very nature, has an intrinsic purpose, the desire to have a pleasurable, interesting experience for its own sake. (The older the students, the more likely we are to forget this.) We should be careful not to confuse the student by suggesting other, extrinsic purposes, no matter how admirable. That will turn attention away from participating in what is being evoked.

Paradoxically, when the transactions are lived through for their own sake, they will probably have as by-products the educational, informative, social, and moral values for which literature is often praised. Even enhancement of skills may result. By the same token, literary works often fail to emerge at all if the texts are offered as the means for the demonstration of reading skills.

Exercises and readings that do not satisfy such meaningful purposes for the child, but are considered defensible means of developing skills, should be offered separately, honestly, as exercises. If needed, they should be recognized as ancillary and supplementary to the real business of reading for meaning, whether efferent or aesthetic.[22]

I speak of both the teaching of efferent reading and the teaching of aesthetic reading because the distinctions in purpose and process should be made clear from the outset. (Of course, I do not mean to imply theoretical explanation of them to the child.) If reading is presented as a meaningful, purposive activity, and if texts are presented in meaningful situations, the two kinds of stance should naturally emerge. Texts should be presented that clearly satisfy one or another purpose. Given the linguistic development of the child, probably there should be greater emphasis in the earlier stages on aesthetic listening and reading.

This view of the two stances opens up the necessity for a new and more rounded concept of comprehension in both efferent and aesthetic reading. I shall venture here only the suggestion that this will involve attention to the transactional, two-way, process and to affective as well as cognitive components of meaning. Recent interest of some psychologists in the role of context in comprehension indicates movement in this direction.[23]

In the teaching of literature, then, our primary responsibility is to encourage, not get in the way of, the aesthetic stance. As the child carries on the process of decontextualization that serves the logical, analytic, cognitive abilities whose development Piaget traced so influentially, we need also to keep alive the habit of paying selective attention to the inner states, the kinesthetic tensions, the feelings, the colorings of the stream of consciousness, that accompany all cognition, and that particularly make possible the evocation of literary works of art from texts.

Much of what we need to do can fortunately be viewed as a reinforcement of the child's own earliest linguistic processes, richly embedded in a cognitive-affective matrix. Transactions with texts that offer some linkage with the child's own experiences and concerns can give rise aesthetically to new experiences. These in turn open new linguistic windows into the world. Recall that when I refer to a reading event, it can be either hearing the text read or having the printed text. Both types of literary experience should continue into the elementary years.

A receptive, nonpressured atmosphere will free the child to adopt the aesthetic stance with pleasant anticipation, without worry about future demands. There will be freedom, too, for various kinds of spontaneous nonverbal and verbal expression during the reading. These can be considered intermingled signs of participation in, and reactions to, the evoked story or poem.

After the reading, our initial function is to deepen the experience. (We know one cannot predict developments in a teaching situation, but we can think in terms of priority of emphasis.) We should help the young reader to return to, relive, savor, the experience. For continuing the focus on what has been seen, heard, felt, teachers have successfully provided the opportunity for various forms of nonverbal expression or response: drawing, painting, playacting, dance. These may sometimes become

ends in themselves, perhaps valuable for a child's development, but only very generally relevant to the reading purposes. Such activities can, however, offer an aesthetic means of giving form to a sense of what has been lived through in the literary transaction. This can give evidence of what has caught the young reader's attention, what has stirred pleasant or unpleasant reactions. This can lead back to the text.

Requests for verbal responses create the greatest hazards. Adults may, often unconsciously, reveal a testing motive. Perhaps there will be a suggestion of what the approved or "correct" response should be. Sometimes there is a tacit steering toward an efferent or analytic stance, toward the kinds of subjects the adult thinks interesting or important. The reader is often hurried away from the aesthetic experience and turned to efferent analysis by questions such as those appended to stories in various basal readers and anthologies and by teachers' questions or tests "checking whether the student has read the text." Questions that call for the traditional analyses of character, setting, and plot are often premature or routine, contributing to shallow, efferent readings.

Some object that the formalists and post-structuralists are right in identifying literature with its system of conventions, its technical traits. My reply is that, by focusing on these components of the text, they fail to do justice to the total aesthetic experience. Metaphor, narrative structure, linguistic conventions, verbal techniques are, of course, important elements of "literary" texts, and they contribute much to the quality of the aesthetic transaction. But they are vacuous concepts without recognition of the importance of stance. Poetic metaphors or narrative suspense, for example, become operative, come into existence, only if the reader pays attention to the inner states that these verbal patterns arouse. After this repeatedly happens, we can communicate to our students the appropriate terminology — when they need it! "Form" is something felt on the pulses, first of all.

How, then, can we deal with the young reader's responses without inhibiting the aesthetic experience? Two answers to this quite real dilemma suggest themselves. First, a truly receptive attitude on the part of teacher and peers — and this requires strong efforts at creating such trust — can be sufficient inducement to children to give spontaneous verbal expression to what has been lived through. Once nonverbal or verbal comments have given some glimpse into the nature of what the young readers have made of the text, the teacher can provide positive reinforcement by leading to further reflection on what in the experienced story or poem had triggered the reactions. Comments by other children and the teacher, of course, also contribute to this imaginative recall of the experience.

Second, if for some reason the teacher finds it appropriate to initiate discussion, remarks (or questions, if necessary!) can guide the reader's attention back toward the reading event. Questions can be sufficiently open to enable the young readers to select concrete details or parts of the text that had struck them most forcibly. The point is to foster expressions of response that keep the experiential, qualitative elements in mind. Did anything especially interest? annoy? puzzle? frighten? please? seem familiar? seem weird? The particular text and the teacher's knowledge of the readers involved will suggest such open-ended questions. The habit of the aesthetic stance, of attention to concrete detail, will be strengthened for further reading. Cognitive abilities, to organize, to interpret, or to explain, will be rooted in the ability to handle responses. (And enhanced "reading skills" will probably be a by-product!)

The young reader will be stimulated to make the connections among initial responses, the evoked work, and the text. He may then be motivated to return to the actual words of the text, to deepen the experience. As students grow older, sharing of responses becomes the basis for valuable interchange. Discovering that others have had different responses, have noticed what was overlooked, have made alternative interpretations, leads to self-awareness and self-criticism.[24]

At the opening of these remarks, I mentioned the need to clarify my own version of reader-response theory, but felt no urge to survey the gamut of competing theories. It seems important, however, to recall that the transactional theory avoids concentration solely on the reader's contribution or on feeling for its own sake,[25] but centers on the reciprocal interplay of reader and text. For years I have extolled the potentialities of literature for aiding us to understand ourselves and others, for widening our horizons to include temperaments and cultures different from our own, for helping us to clarify our conflicts in values, for illuminating our world. I have believed, and have become increasingly convinced, that these benefits spring only from emotional and intellectual participation in evoking the work of art, through reflection on our own aesthetic experience. Precisely because every aes-

thetic reading of a text is a unique creation, woven out of the inner life and thought of the reader, the literary work of art can be a rich source of insight and truth. But it has become apparent that even when literature is presented to young readers, the efferent emphasis of our society and schools tends to negate the potential interest and benefits of the reading. Literature is "an endangered species." By establishing the habit of aesthetic evocation and personal response during the elementary years, teachers of children's literature can make a prime contribution to the health of our culture.

Notes

1. Tompkins, Jane P. (Ed.) *Reader-response criticism.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, p xxvi; Suleiman, Susan R. and Crosman, Inge (Eds.) *The reader in the text.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 45.

2. Rosenblatt, Louise M. *The reader, the text, the poem.* Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978 presents the fullest statement of the transactional theory. The present article cannot deal with such matters as "correctness" of interpretation, the author's intention, the openness and constraints of the text, or the role of the critic.

3. This is conveniently documented by articles by 11 leading psychologists (Jerome Bruner, Richard Lazarus, Ulric Neisser, David McClelland, et al.) on "the state of the science" in *Psychology Today*, May 1982, pp. 41-59. See especially the article by Ulric Neisser.

4. Keller-Cohen, Deborah. Context in child language, *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 1978, *7,* pp. 433-482.

5. Halliday, M.A.K. *Learning to mean.* New York: Elsevier, 1975.

6. James, William. *The principles of psychology.* New York: Dover Publications, pp.245-246.

7. Werner, Heinz, and Kaplan, Bernard. *Symbol formation.* New York: Wiley, 1963, p. 18.

8. Gibson, E.J. *How perception really develops.* In David Laberge and S. Jay Samuels (Eds.), *Basic Processes in Reading.* Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1975, p. 171; Rommetveit, Ragnar. *Words, meanings, and messages.* New York: Academic Press, 1968, pp. 147, 167; Werner and Kaplan, *Symbol Formation,* pp.23-24 and *passim.*

9. Bates, Elizabeth. *The emergence of symbols.* New York: Academic Press, 1979, pp. 65-66.

10. See Dewey, John. *How we think.* Lexington, Mass.: D.C.Heath, 1933, Ch. X; Dewey, John. Qualitative thought, *Philosophy and civilization.* New York: Minton, Balch, 1931, pp. 93-116.

11. Vygotsky, L.S. *Thought and language,* (Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar, Ed. and trans.) Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1962, p. 8.

12. Tedlock, Ernest (Ed.) *Dylan Thomas.* New York: Mercury, 1963, p. 54.

13. Izard, Carroll E. On the ontogenesis of emotions and emotion-cognition relationships in infancy. In Michael Lewis and Leonard Rosenblum (Eds.), *The development of affect.* New York: Plenum Press, 1978, p. 404.

14. White, Dorothy. *Books before five.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 13.

15. Conrad, Joseph. Preface. *The nigger of the narcissus.* New York: Doubleday, Page, 1922, p. x.

16. White, p.79.

17. The problems of validity in interpretation and of the author's intention are treated in Rosenblatt, *The reader, the text, the poem,* Chapters 5 and 6.

18. Wordsworth, William. Ode, intimations of immortality. *Poetical works.* London: Oxford University Press, 1959, p.46.

19. See *Research in the teaching of English, 15* (4), December 1981, pp. 293-309, 343-354, and *passim.*

20. Bateson, Gregory, and Mead, Margaret. *Balinese character.* New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1942; Geertz, Clifford. *The interpretation of cultures.* New York: Basic Books, 1973.

21. Purves, Alan. *Literature education in ten countries.* Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1973.

22. Cf. Huey, Edmund Burke. *The psychology and pedagogy of reading.* Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968 (original edition, 1908), pp. 345, 380.

23. See Harste, Jerome C., and Carey, Robert F. Comprehension as setting. In *New perspectives on comprehension,* Monograph in Language and Reading Studies, Indiana University, No. 3, October 1979.

In a volume and an article that reflect the psychologists' usual preoccupation with efferent reading, I find this concession: "It may be in the rapid interplay of feelings . . . that the source of the creation of ideas, later to receive their analytic flesh and bones, may be found. If so, how sad it would be if it were discovered that the real problem of many readers is that their instruction so automatizes them that they do not develop a feeling for what they read or use the feelings available to them in the development of new understandings from reading." Spiro, Rand J. Constructive processes in prose comprehension and recall. In Rand J. Spiro, Bertram Bruce, and William Brewer (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in reading comprehension.* Hillside, N.J.: L Erlbaum, 1980, p. 274.

24. Rosenblatt, L. *Literature as exploration,* 1976 (distributed by the National Council of Teachers of English) develops further the implications for teaching.

25. The recent publication of *On Learning to Read,* by Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan, with its subtitle, *The Child's Fascination with Meaning,* and its emphasis on response, leads me to disclaim any actual resemblance to my views. These authors reiterate what many of us, from Dewey on, have been saying about the importance of meaning and the child's own feelings, and about the narrow, dull approach of much teaching of beginning reading. But the book's concentration on a doctrinal psychoanalytic interpretation of response, disregard of the process of making meaning out of printed symbols, and treatment of the text as a repository of ready-made meanings or didactic human stereotypes, add up to an inadequate view of the relationship between reader and text.