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Reader response: Students develop text understanding

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ABSTRACT

Prompted by Rosenblatt's (1978) framework of the reader's transactional relationship to the text, this qualitative study examines four fifth-grade students' stances and their responses to a narrative text in three classroom activities, a peer-led discussion group, a story map activity, and written responses. This study primarily investigates issues regarding the accessibility of shifts in stance for the students. Additionally, it calls into question Rosenblatt's construct of the aesthetic-efferent continuum.

This study was developed with the underlying goal of investigating children's emergent understandings of narrative texts across a set of literacy activities. It was prompted by Rosenblatt's (1938, 1978, 1980, 1985a, 1985b, 1991, 1993) framework of the reader's transactional relationship to the text. According to this theory, the meaning does not reside solely within the text or solely within the reader; the meaning for a text comes from the transaction between the reader and the text within a particular context. The reader maintains an active role in deriving meaning and adopts different stances, either primarily aesthetic or efferent, depending on the kind of meaning he/she intends to derive. In the aesthetic stance, the reader fuses the "cognitive and affective elements of consciousness — sensations, images, feelings, ideas — into a personally lived-through poem or story" (1980, p. 388). The reader, thus, engages in a synergistic process of experiencing literature to build an interpretation. In contrast, when adopting an efferent stance the reader focuses on

the information he/she intends to carry away from the text. These stances represent different ways for a reader to approach a text. In presenting the differing nature of the stances, Rosenblatt does not portray these in conflict. Rather the reader's responses represent points along a continuum. This study, however, expands on the problematical and complex issues of ways of responding to texts and what it means for elementary students to shift from one stance to another and how this affects their interpretation of the text.

Understanding what children do as they read/listen/write/discuss and respond to literature and pedagogical implications for enhancing students' reading processes and literary responses have engendered a substantive body of reader response research (Beach and Hynds, 1991; Cooper, 1985; Many and Cox, 1992). While researchers generally agree that the reading process is a transactional one and have elaborated on various facets of the reader, text, and context, important issues in reader response continue to be explored (Beach, 1998a; Rogers, 1999), particularly the complexity of stance (Newton, Stegemeier, Padak, 1999) and the readers' construction of the narrative world (Beach, 1998b; Benton, 1992; Enciso, 1992).

The thrust of this qualitative study was three-fold. It investigated the efferent-aesthetic stances which four fifth-grade students adopted in transaction with a narrative text in three learning contexts, a student-led discussion group, a story map activity, and written responses. It examined the particular responses which the students generated as they negotiated meaning with the narrative text, for example, responses in relationship to the story world. Primarily, it addressed deeply important questions about shifts from aesthetic to efferent stances for the four elementary students. In a larger sense, this study extends and challenges Rosenblatt's notions of the reader's construction of textual meaning along an aesthetic-efferent continuum.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In contrast to earlier literary theorists, Rosenblatt (1978) recognized the active role of the reader and his/her choice of stance in transaction with the text in a particular context. The text presents a set of linguistic, conceptual, and referential stimuli. The context encompasses the broader cultural matrix as well as the particular "socially molded circumstances

and purpose of the reader" (1985b). The reader, aware of and part of the context, infuses meaning into the textual squiggles and early in the reader-event selects, either consciously or unconsciously, a predominant stance. Awareness of the complexity of these stances has implications for understanding what occurs in classrooms: the mismatch between the reader's aesthetic stance and efferent expectations, the problematic use of the efferent stance with regard to the teaching and testing of literature (Rosenblatt, 1978), and the multiple kinds of reader responses to the story world (Enciso, 1992).

Rosenblatt (1978) expresses her line of thinking about complex issues of demarcation between aesthetic and efferent reading:

⁻Actually, no hard-and-fast line separates efferent — scientific or expository — reading on the one hand from aesthetic reading on the other. It is more accurate to think of a continuum, a series of gradations between the nonaesthetic and the aesthetic extremes. The reader's stance toward the text... may vary in a multiplicity of ways between the two poles" (p. 35).

Furthermore, a text may be read efferently or aesthetically for different purposes, and parts of the same text may elicit different stances. A reader with a predominantly efferent stance may pay some attention to qualitative overtones while a reader with a predominantly aesthetic stance may focus on some cognitive elements. Rosenblatt considers most reading as "hovering" near the middle of the continuum (p. 21). However, readers may also experience stances at the extreme ends of the continuum. On one end, the efferent reader may be so absorbed in extracting information from a medicine bottle that she excludes subjective awareness. The aesthetic reader, on the other end, may be so immersed in living through the narrative that he may not process extraneous information in the text.

Rosenblatt (1978) presents the role of the reader as having to "learn to handle" stances to texts as he/she shifts from aesthetic to efferent reading (p. 37). Nevertheless, the aesthetic stance is not accessible for all. While some readers may adopt an aesthetic stance intuitively or because of early background, other readers have not developed the capacity to read aesthetically, perhaps because of the emphasis on efferent reading in the schools. Regarding the transactional process and children, the

teacher is responsible for developing students' awareness of efferent and aesthetic stances and, additionally, guiding young students toward the appropriate stance for a given text.

Reader-response theorists and researchers have addressed the reader's roles/stances to the literary text. Britton (1982, 1984), for example, developed a framework for language use in which he made the distinction between participant-spectator roles in relationship to non-literary and literary discourse. According to Britton, language in the participant role is used to fulfill instrumental needs and participate in the outside world while language in the spectator role is used to contemplate events in the literary world. Britton (1984), in fact, claimed that his participant-spectator roles were similar to Rosenblatt's efferent-aesthetic stances, although she disavowed this (1985a, 1985b). Britton (1984) also conceded that discussion of stance entails "tricky" considerations. While a reader may maintain an overall spectator role/stance towards a literary text, the text itself may include material that in another context would be considered participatory.

Iser (1980a, 1980b), similar to Rosenblatt, discussed reading as a dynamic process in which the reader creates meaning in interaction with the text. He postulated that gaps in a text provide the impetus for communication in the reading process. They provide potentially illuminating moments for the reader:

> *What is missing from the apparently trivial scenes, the gaps arising out of the dialogue — this is what stimulates the reader into filling the blanks with projections. He is drawn into the events and made to supply what is meant from what is not said; it is the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to the meaning (1980a, p. 111).*

Smith (1992) conducted a study of the interpretative processes of 10 ninth-grade students, half of whom were reading below grade-level and half above grade-level on standardized tests, as they read two stories. He made the distinction between submission, the reader's passive acceptance of the text as the repository of meaning, and surrender, the reader's willingness to enter the world of the story and create meaning. Smith found that the less-successful students had an information-driven approach; they did not have the goals or the strategies to move beyond the immediate evocation, thereby submitting to the text's authority rather

than exercising an active role in shaping textual meaning. Smith asserted that "readers must assert power to have meaningful transactions with texts" (p. 144).

Rosenblatt and others have addressed the reader's relationship to the literary world. Rosenblatt (1978) presented, but did not develop, the phenomenon of aesthetic reading in which the reader crosses the boundary from the actual world into the "new" world:

The physical signs of the text enable him [the reader] to reach through himself and the verbal symbols to something sensed as outside and beyond his own personal world. The boundary between inner and outer world breaks down, and the literary work of art... leads us into a new world. (p. 21)

Britton (1984) also recognized the issue of the reader's focus of attention in literary discourse. Citing Langer (1953), he emphasized the importance of stance at the outset of the reader's encounter with the text, how the reader, in effect, switches or breaks with the outside environment:

The illusion of life is the primary illusion of all poetic art. It is at least tentatively established by the very first sentence, which has to switch the reader's or hearer's attitude from conversational interest to literary interest, i.e., from actuality to fiction. (p. 213)

Benton (1992) explored the nature of the literary world, or "secondary world," and the "narrative voices" which the reader creates in a dynamic process of evocation and response to the text. Benton describes this metaphorically as a reader stepping into a three-dimensional virtual world. The reader's depiction of this world is constantly being created, involving both imaging and imagination. According to Benton, it is of critical importance for educators to gain a clearer understanding of what constitutes the child's creation of the secondary world and to recognize the dialogism of reader response which concerns itself both with the language of the text and the response of the reader in order to better understand the literary process.

Enciso (1992), based on her research with six fifth-grade students, examined the complexity of the phenomena of the reader entering the story world and developed seven main categories and 20 subcategories of participation. Two of the categories include: "Readers' descriptions of

the distance between themselves and events in the story world," and the subcategories include: "Midst, Distant observer, Close observer,"; and "Readers' descriptions of associations between themselves and the characters or events in the story world," and the subcategories include: "Empathy, Identify, Merge, Feel close." Enciso's study lends support to the transactional model of reading which views the reader as an active constructor of meaning. Enciso concluded that the range of readers' text comprehension is "far richer" than previously described. As educators, it is important to delve into issues of readers' engagement with the text. "Meaning, learning, or any kind of synthesis of experiences may not arise at all until the reader has entered into — and become engaged with — the story world," (p. 100).

This qualitative study, then, examines critical issues which Rosenblatt and later theorists have recognized as meriting further exploration. It closely examines stance from the viewpoint of four fifth-grade students as they negotiated textual meaning within three classroom learning contexts. It examines the responses the students generated to a narrative text, particularly their responses to the story world. Additionally, this study focuses on issues of shifts in stance and the accessibility of shifts for individual students. In essence, this study builds on valuable insights gained in reader-response theory, and it calls for a more comprehensive theory to account for the data presented here.

METHOD

A case study was selected as the framework to investigate the complex phenomena of four fifth-grade students' negotiation of textual meaning across three language arts activities. This methodology (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) provides the opportunity to focus on and explore in-depth four students' actions and interactions in varying contexts; thus, a group of four students' negotiation with the text was selected out of a larger class study. The group participants were selected as part of "purposeful sampling" (Patton, 1990) because of their differences in gender, academic, socioeconomic, and special needs backgrounds. Given the limitations of the data to represent stances and responses to one narrative during one session of activities, these results are presented as a seed to encourage further questions about and examination of reader stance.

Setting and student participants

A fifth-grade class of 25 students in a public school located in a suburban area was the setting for this study. The student participants in the study were Mark, a boy who was labeled as an inclusion student with average ability and severe language processing problems (except auditory); he was not given an Iowa reading test. Other students included: Kris, a girl with low-average reading ability on standardized reading assessment who had a reading stanine of 4; Jean, a girl with very high reading ability on standardized reading assessment who had a reading stanine of 8; and Ned, a boy with high reading ability on standardized reading assessment who had a reading stanine of 7. (The Iowa scores are represented in a range of 9 stanines with 9 at the upper end.) The students came from heterogeneous socioeconomic backgrounds: two students qualified for free/reduced lunch, one student was from a middle-class background, and another student was from an upper-middle class income level. One student's ethnic background was part Native-American, and the remaining students were Caucasian. The students' parents had varied educational attainment levels, non-high school completion, high school and college graduates.

Mrs. H., the fifth-grade classroom teacher, was an experienced elementary teacher who was also working towards a master's degree in educational administration. The researcher was a professor with a specialization in language and literacy.

Literary selection

Androcles and the Lion (Paxton, 1991) was selected as the narrative focus for the project because of the alignment of the district-mandated curricular topic of Attractions with the book's topic, the friendship between superficially dissimilar central characters, as well as high quality illustrations (Rayevsky) and content which was thought to spark interest and discussion. *Androcles and the Lion* is a retelling in verse of an Aesop fable about Androcles, a young boy, who assists a lion with a thorn in his paw. The lion later saves Androcles' life when he is in danger, and then both are set free.

PROCEDURE

Students' prior experience with language arts activities

During the fall semester, students responded to literature in language arts activities, peer-led discussion groups, story map activities, and responses to questions about the narrative, which were later included in the sessions for observation and analysis in February. A brief description of these activities will be presented in the context of the reading and language-arts program.

Students responded to literature daily during silent reading, journals, and peer-led discussion groups. Students' responses in the peer-led discussion groups were a major component of the language arts program. Students selected their own topics and were encouraged to respond with open-ended responses; however, they were also provided with some structure to guide them. The students brought their journals to the discussion groups and used their entries as starting points for their discussions. Each student could select a prompt(s) to focus on from the following *Literature Response Prompts*: "I was surprised by... I didn't understand when... made me feel because... I began to think of... I wonder what would happen if... The relationship between... I'm not sure... reminded me of." Mrs. H. also scaffolded students' responses to literary elements such as plot, character, and setting. Peer-group participants filled out a daily self-assessment form in which they noted questions, predictions, and comments. Neither the journal entries nor the literature study group sheets were graded, although Mrs. H. read both as a running check of student contributions.

The story-map activity was implemented approximately four times prior to the study, and thus students were familiar with the protocol. During this activity, students worked as a group to fill in one answer for each category on the worksheet, and afterwards groups presented their answers to the class. The students' story-map worksheets were generally graded.

The comprehension questions for the written-response activity in the study were similar to the kinds of questions students responded to in oral and written form in class. Mrs. H. asked questions to probe students' thinking when she visited the discussion groups on a rotating basis and she also asked questions for assessment, generally in written format. The written responses were sometimes graded.

Study

The research was conducted for two sessions in February with the fifth-grade class divided into six groups; however, one group of four students' responses during one session was selected as the focus of this study. At the outset, the fifth-grade class listened to a teacher read-aloud of *Androcles and the Lion.* A read-aloud was chosen as the format to present the narrative text, rather than silent reading, in the hope that it would be understood by all the students. Mrs. H. used skills of dramatic interpretation to engage the listeners in aesthetic responses to the texts.

First, Mark, Kris, Jean, and Ned discussed their responses to the narrative in a peer-led discussion group for approximately forty minutes. Second, the group members participated in a story map activity for approximately half-an-hour. The students wrote responses relating to the text structure of the read-aloud on a story map worksheet according to the categories of "Title, Author, Setting, Characters, Time, Place, Describe Setting, Problem, Events Leading to the Solution, and Solution." Third, students wrote individual responses relating to *Androcles and the Lion.* The questions called for the following responses: the names of the characters, the lesson of the story, sequencing of Androcles' first and subsequent thoughts about the lion, adjectives to describe Androcles' character, and describing an analogous situation to the one in the story.

Data collection

Data were collected for the students' stances and responses to *Androcles and the Lion* in the three post-read aloud activities, a peer-led discussion group, story map activity, and written responses. The data for the discussion group and the story map activity consisted of observations and videotapes/transcripts. The written materials included the four students' story-map worksheets and the four students' written responses to six questions.

Analysis

The videotapes and transcripts of the four students' peer-led discussion group and story map extension activity, and the written materials, the story map worksheets and the written responses, were reviewed multiple times in order to map patterns of student-generated stances and responses to the narrative within the learning contexts. The students'

stances were examined according to Rosenblatt's (1978) definitions. When adopting an aesthetic stance, a reader brings forth feelings, thoughts, sensations from within him/herself while attending to textual stimuli to create meaning; he reflects about the evocation as well as elaborates and shapes ongoing responses. The reader's focus is on the literary experience during the reading event within a particular context. In contrast, a reader who adopts an efferent stance closes down affect and overtones of meaning within a particular context; she employs selective attention to extract information from the text for a purpose to be achieved after the event.

Students' responses in each learning context were examined for the kinds and variety of topics, how these were implicated in students' negotiation of textual meaning, and how they related to stance. The students' responses in the discussion group clustered according to broad categories of student-generated topics: affective, sensation/language, visual, literary elements, characters' perspective, and metaliterary. The students' responses in the story map activity tended to focus on the worksheet categories, such as "problem, solution." The students' written responses focused on the questions which elicited character descriptions, lesson of the story, providing an analogy.

The learning contexts were examined with the understanding that prior class participation in classroom language arts activities provided students with predispositions to adopt certain kinds of stances. The following dimensions of the learning contexts were investigated: student-generated versus externally-developed topics, open-ended textual exploration versus search for specific information, multiple versus single interpretation considered acceptable, individual versus group response, and non-graded versus graded activity. In addition, each learning environment was not considered discrete but rather it was understood that participation in the preceding language arts activity(ies) influenced the following activity in the sequence.

RESULTS

As the students began to interpret the narrative *Androcles and the Lion* in their peer-led discussion group, the students appeared to exhibit an aesthetic stance. In the subsequent activities, many students shifted to an efferent stance with the goal of locating specific textual information

and producing the "right" answers. The students' stances and responses, and relationship to the story world, will be discussed for each language arts activity.

Discussion group

During the discussion group, the students adopted an aesthetic stance which focused on the lived-through experience. Their responses fell into the following categories: 1) affective/express feelings, like book because, pull reader into text; 2) language/rhyme, word use; 3) visual/color, illustrations; 4) literary elements/theme, genre, text opening, ending, length, use of time, ellipsis, plot; 5) character's perspective/motivation, emotions; and 6) metaliterary/compare book to other books, change anything in the text, discuss how to interpret books. The students' opening responses, their discussion of text ellipsis and illustrations, and variation in responses to the story world will be presented.

In their opening responses in the discussion group, the students, Ned [N], Kris [K], Jean [J], and Mark [M], positioned themselves in relation to the text. Britton (1984) noted the importance of reader stance with the initial encounter with the text:

N: I liked the book because it's, I like the moral of the story, and [express feeling]

It's ok, and I like how when the lion, 'cause a man helped the lion [theme]

Take a thorn out of his paw that he didn't attack the man, he knew the man. He started licking his hand. [character's perspective]

K: I like the book how he just came running from his master [express feeling] and he was wondering what was the noise. [character's perspective]

He finally figured out what made all the noise. And, I liked how it rhymes in the poem. [language/rhyme]

J: I liked how it rhymes in the poem, too. [express, feeling, rhyme]

I also liked how he helped the lion and then how the lion didn't do anything to him. He just licked him. [theme]

Ned linked his positive affect first with an overview of a central literary theme and then he made a statement about the character's perspective [lion] while he was performing an action in the story, "he didn't attack the man, he knew the man." Kris's initial responses suggests she identified with Androcles as he was fleeing, and she used two verbs to pinpoint what Androcles was thinking, "wondering," and "figured out." Jean discussed the rhyme and the characters' actions, their reciprocal support which related to a theme of the fable. Mark, the student who was labeled as inclusion, did not make many remarks in the discussion; however, the remarks he made were relevant to the topic. Mark's initial responses were that he liked the book, and he liked "how they [the characters] got along," focusing on the characters' emotional interactions.

The students' initial responses suggest they were engaging with the characters' feelings and actions. At the same time each student's response had an individual accent. Ned's responses might be characterized as "hovering" along the continuum (Rosenblatt, 1978). While he entered the characters' feelings and used his imagination, he also had overtones of efferent reading. Jean, while responding aesthetically, discussed the characters' actions rather than feelings. Mark's comments focused on the gist of the narrative.

Kris's responses indicate that from the beginning she was operating in the story world in the "merge" association with the characters and events, that is, "feeling like one has become the character or a part of the setting" (Enciso, 1992, p. 92). Kris appeared to place herself in the character's perspective. Throughout the discussion, Kris's remarks continued in this vein. Later she said, "I think how he [Androcles] took out the thorn he must have felt like he was the owner of the lion." When the students discussed what they might do to change the text, Kris said, "Maybe I'd tell a little bit how the guy, the man, rode on the lion to get back to his master." Here Kris appeared to envision events not stated in the text; she appeared to be living in the story world. Kris described how she felt pulled or grabbed into the text, "I really liked the book because it grabs your attention." Langer (1953) discussed how the reader, in effect, switches to enter the story world, and Kris's responses suggest that she switched into the story world.

The students next addressed text ellipses, gaps in identifying the characters and gaps in the plot. Iser (1980) said that gaps in the text are critical spaces for the reader to fill in meaning. Ned queried, "Did you

like how the story never tells who the master really was? It just said master and said at the end the emperor was there. It never said how he got there." Kris shared her viewpoint about Androcles' action, "Maybe he could have ran with the lion." The students later picked up the thread of ellipsis in the narrative and referred to it as skips. Jean developed this concept, "Yeah, on one page, it shows they're in the jungle. The next page, he was back home immediately. It doesn't show how he was walking home." Mark commented about how the text was produced, "They cut out some stuff."

The students' discussion of illustrations led to a discussion of literary interpretation. Ned's first response to the illustration was, "I like the pictures, big, huge." Later, Ned advanced an alternate viewpoint: he prefers a book without pictures because it encourages the reader to actively use her/his imagination. In a book with pictures, the language is not telling you what to picture, the pictures are showing you. Kris, on the other hand, stated that with pictures you can still imagine; however, when you don't know what something looks like, the pictures can show you.

N: I would rather have a book <u>without pictures</u> because if you are reading a book without pictures, you can imagine.
K: You could still <u>imagine</u>.
N: It's <u>not telling</u> you what to picture in your mind. You could picture a lion in your mind, and the lion could be bigger, but in a picture it <u>shows you</u>.
K: ...But what if it has blue eyes and long blonde hair, you wouldn't really know how to describe it?
N: That's the <u>fun of it</u>.

In this statement, Ned expressed his feelings about his transaction with a literary text, how using his imagination is "fun." Similarly, Iser (1980b), conceived of reading as "only a pleasure when it is active and creative" (p. 51).

In the final part of the discussion, Kris presented what she thought Androcles was feeling when he ran away. Ned disagreed with her and said that the text did not provide that information. Kris maintained that the text explained why Androcles ran away. However, as she and Ned talked, she realized that the text was not explicit.

K: He [Androcles] was kind of <u>sad</u> because his master was yelling at him, making him <u>do stuff that he didn't want to</u>. He ran away and he heard this weird noise.

N: You see, that's just my point. He [the author] <u>didn't tell you</u> why he ran away.

K: Yes, it did. It <u>told you</u> in the book.

N: He <u>didn't say</u> why he was running away.

K: You'd probably have to <u>feel</u> it.

N: That's my point. It makes <u>you</u> fill in the blanks.

K: That's kind of like a picture book and not a picture book. First you've got to <u>think</u> in your mind, and then you <u>don't</u>... It's kind of a <u>challenge</u>...

N: That's the point. It makes <u>you fill it in</u> yourself, the story with blanks. You fill in the blanks yourself.

K: Choose your own <u>imagination</u>.

In this passage, Kris offered that in order to experience the text you have to "feel it." According to Ned and Kris, the reader thinks, fill in overtones and empty spaces, visualizes, feels, and uses one's imagination when creating a literary interpretation. They enunciate in many respects the reader's active role in creating meaning developed by Iser (1980a, 1980b) and Rosenblatt (1978).

Story map activity

        The story map activity illustrates problematic issues relating to students' negotiation of stances across activities, from the aesthetic stance of the discussion group to the efferent stance of the story map worksheet. Only one student, Ned, shifted to an efferent stance and successfully negotiated the story map activity. During this activity, students followed prior class protocol with story map worksheets and functioned as a group. They focused on text elements as determined by the worksheet categories with the aim of arriving at answers which would be evaluated later. While frequently disagreeing about particular items, the students reached consensus by the end of the activity and filled in similar wording on the slots.

        The students wrote the following items on the worksheet: <u>Title</u>, "A. and the lion"; <u>Author</u>: [blank]; <u>Setting</u>: [blank], <u>Characters</u>: "lion, boy,

the master"; Time: [blank]; Place: "ancient Greece." For the several of the items, Kris, Mark, and Jean wrote the following items on their worksheet: Problem: "A. ran away from his master" Solution: "He got free." Ned's responses were somewhat different. He wrote: "Problem: The lion had a thorn stuck in his finger and A. ran away"; and for Solution, he wrote: "The lion licked his hand the emperor let A. go."

Jean appeared to adopt an efferent stance in the story map activity, recognizing that the worksheet required the "right" answers. She raised issues, however, about the fit between the responses students were writing for the efferent categories Problem and Solution on the worksheet and their lack of compatibility with the meaning for *Androcles and the Lion* as discussed in the aesthetic discussion group. She repeatedly expressed concern about the Problem and Solution categories:

J: What was the Problem?...
K: The Problem was that he ran away from his master.
N: The Problem was the lion had a thorn in his finger.
J: But that's not the main Problem.

Near the end of the activity, Jean said, "I don't even remember the story now. I'm getting messed up." Jean admitted that she was confused, possibly by trying to recall the specific information required on the worksheet after participating in the open-ended discussion group. She may also have been distracted by the story map discussion itself which focused on extracting information rather than trying to arrive at a larger meaning. Finally Jean said, "I don't know what to put down for Solution... I'll just put down: 'He got let go.' I don't know." She appeared to adopt the attitude that she was going to accede to the group decision, although she could see that fitting the narrative into the narrowly defined categories was problematic.

Mark's stance during the story map activity cannot be determined because he did not participate in the discussion. He wrote the answers others were writing on their worksheets.

Kris was the student who most clearly illustrates the student caught in a bind of reading creatively in an efferent context. Kris apparently did not see that her interpretation did not fit smoothly into the categories on the worksheet or refer to the explicitly stated lesson in the text which referred to helping one another. Kris continued in the story map activity with the textual interpretation she mentioned in the discussion group of the theme of Androcles' running from his master. Because the group

agreed to put Androcles' running away as the Problem and getting free as the Solution, this may have confirmed for her that this was the narrative's central theme. She appeared satisfied with the Problem and Solution categories and explained her response to the Solution, "He [Androcles] got pushed to the ground and came over and the lion licked him and the master said he was free." Her worksheet responses probably would not be graded as acceptable in terms of a standard interpretation of the fable.

Ned appeared to adopt an efferent stance to the worksheet while locating information from the text. At the same time, he rejected the validity of the story map categories. He apparently understood that the dichotomy, Problem, and Solution, as presented on the story map sheet had little to do with the theme of Androcles and the Lion. When Jean kept asking him about the meaning for the Problem and Solution, he finally said: "That doesn't matter. The moral is the matter, 'What goes around, comes around.'" Ned appeared eager to fill in the blanks as quickly as possible in order to complete the task.

Written responses

The students' written responses illustrated problematic issues relating to students' negotiation of shifts in stance both across activities and shifts in stance within the written response activity itself. The written response questions elicited both efferent and aesthetic responses. The six questions and the students' responses will be discussed sequentially.

The first question asked the students to name the two main characters. The four students' efferent responses provided the characters, "Androcles and the lion."

The second question asked students for the lesson of the story. The students wrote:

What was the lesson of the story?
M: If you help someone they will help you.
K: The lesson of the story was to never ran away from your master.
J: Treat people the way you want to be treated.
N: To treat others the way you want to be treated.

Three students' responses, Mark, Ned, and Jean, could be considered efferent because they paraphrased information from *Androcles and the Lion*. The Lesson" was stated at the conclusion of the narrative: "The

lesson we might learn/Is, when we help another,/He will help us in return" (Paxton, 1991, p. 5). Mark, for example, wrote, "If you help someone they will help you." Ned and Jean stated, "Treat others the way you want to be treated." Taken from another perspective, their stance could be considered aesthetic in the sense that the students had generated the topic of a man helping a lion and the lion helping a man as a central issue in the [aesthetic] discussion group. A third possibility is that the aesthetic and efferent stances overlapped; the students indeed remembered the quote from the read-aloud, they also thought this was the main theme. Interestingly, these three students appeared to discount the Problem and Solution categories on the story map worksheet when they discussed the lesson.

Kris's aesthetic stance in her response to this question appeared to be consistent with her close identification with Androcles' perspective which she expressed in the discussion group and story map activity. She enunciated a different theme from the three students and from the "lesson" expressed in the narrative. Although she may not have had the skills to express it elegantly, she appeared to interpret the lesson of the fable as Androcles' flight from slavery and attainment of freedom. She wrote, "The lesson of the story was to never ran away from your master." Although many readers would say that it is not the primary theme, Kris's interpretation of attaining freedom is certainly a theme running throughout the fable.

The third and fourth questions asked students to sequence Androcles' initial and subsequent thoughts after he met the lion. These questions could be considered efferent because they requested specific information from the text. The three students sequenced the items according to the story line while Kris reversed them. Kris's responses could be interpreted in several ways: possibly she was not attending to the exact time frame because, one might conjecture, she was immersed in the story world; she could not remember the information after the intervening discussion and story map activities; or she inadvertently juxtaposed the responses.

The fifth question asked students to describe Androcles as a person. This question was primarily aesthetic, asking students to call up their individual responses to the character. They described Androcles as "nice, kind."

The sixth question asked students to think of a situation where it would be important to remember the lesson from the story. This question was open-ended and supported a creative response. Three students provided responses relating to interpersonal situations. Mark's response appeared most closely aligned with the theme of helping someone in need, "you help," while Ned wrote, "When you are making fun of someone," and Jean wrote, "when you don't like someone." Kris, on the other hand, focused on the theme of liberty, "He could of begged the master to be free and wild."

In this activity, three students were able to negotiate the shifts in stances of the questions, while one student, Kris, did not sequence plot events in the correct order or provide the literal lesson of the fable. She maintained a predominantly aesthetic stance consistent with her interpretation from prior activities.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This case study illustrates four elementary students' stances and their responses to a narrative text in three learning contexts. The major finding from this study is that shifts in stance were not accessible for all four students in the three post-read aloud activities. Three students' responses suggest that while they adopted predominant stances in each of the activities, they also, according to Rosenblatt's construct, maneuvered along a continuum selecting a gradation of stance in an on-going basis while responding to the text. However, one student did not bridge the stances and shifted back and forth. For this student, the shift to an efferent stance appeared to be in conflict with her participation in the story world.

What were the characteristics of the reader in this study who maintained an (almost) consistently aesthetic stance? Rosenblatt recognized the aesthetic reader at the extreme end of the aesthetic continuum as one who is "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" (1982, p. 270). Kris, the reader, appeared to exemplify the "midst—reader in the midst of the story world; there somewhere," and "merge—feeling like one has become the character or a part of the setting" levels of participation in the story world (Enciso, 1992, p. 91). Kris's aesthetic responses to efferent questions in the written response

activity did not indicate lack of comprehension but rather her participation in the narrative world and close identification with the character, Androcles. One may conjecture that once a reader suspends disbelief and enters the story world, she may not be able to step in and out of this world, and, for such a reader to go from the aesthetic world to the efferent world, may be to negate the other. Kris appeared to exemplify the characteristics of this aesthetic reader.

Kris's stance and her responses, thus, do not suggest a point moving along a continuum. Her predominant stance to the text, in fact, suggests a conflict or break from inside and outside the story world. On the other hand, at times in the discussion, she discussed literary concepts, such as illustrations, plot development, with other members of the discussion group. These instances, then, suggest a complex array of behaviors. All four students' stances and responses, in fact, indicate the complexity of reading. Ned's stances, as well, might more accurately be described as not hovering at a point along a continuum. These data call into question some of the assumptions of an aesthetic-efferent continuum and ask us to re-envision our understanding of reading. The students' transactional reading process might alternatively be viewed as the reader surrounding the text and adopting a stance(s), imaging and imagining, and taking and appropriating what he/she needs to construct meaning.

Listening to the students as they developed text understanding provided insight into how they viewed the reading process. In the discussion group, Kris and Ned formulated their ideas about reading. They discussed reading as actively constructing meaning by imaging and imagining, filling in gaps, thinking, feeling, and engaging with the text. Many of the ideas which they originated have also been discussed by reader-response theorists (Benton, 1992; Britton, 1982; Iser, 1980b; Rosenblatt, 1992; Smith, 1992).

Several additional patterns emerged from this study which support our understanding of reader response. In their transactional relationship to the narrative, the readers, the text, and the context played a role in creating meaning. In their initial responses to the text, the four students in the discussion group adopted an aesthetic stance in which they responded effectively, "I liked the book..." They felt hooked into the text and used visceral expressions such as, "[it] grabs my attention." Britton, 1984 noted the initial stance is important when drawing the reader into the narrative. In addition, story liking is related positively to

readers' willingness to engage with texts (Beach and Hynds, 1991). The students' responses to textual aspects such as incongruity and ellipsis appeared to be factors which influenced their engagement with the narrative. Beach and Hynds (1991) noted, "readers take more time to make inferences about stories in which information about characters' plans, goals, and states is deleted" (p. 469).

The four students' aesthetic stance and their responses in the peer-led discussion group, both in scope and content, were consistent with studies (Cox and Many, 1992b; Many, 1990; Many and Wiseman, 1992) that suggest that an aesthetic approach promotes students' high levels of literary understanding. Approaches which incorporate teaching literary elements with an aesthetic orientation support students' wide "repertoire of response strategies" without diminishing their aesthetic responses (Many, Wiseman, Altieri, 1996).

The context of the discussion group itself provided cues for the aesthetic stance. The students had prior experience with self-selecting topics and reflecting on their responses in literary peer-led discussion groups which were ungraded. The students' predominantly efferent stance of the story map activity and the mixed efferent-aesthetic stance of the written response activity were influenced by prior class protocols for these activities which emphasized search for the "correct" answer in a frequently graded activity. Asking students to respond creatively to a literary text in one activity and then respond efferently in a subsequent activity[ies] raise questions about whether/how such activities nurture or nullify, "foster or impede" (Rosenblatt, 1986, p. 126) the aesthetic evocation. This study then illuminates a critical educational issue of a student reading creatively versus the contextual demands of reading for specific information.

While Rosenblatt saw the context as static and focused her attention on the individual reader's transaction with the text, a more inclusive reading theory needs to account for the dynamics of evolving contexts and the dynamics of a group of readers encountering a text. As the students infused their ideas into the discussion of the relationship of illustrations of textual meaning, they were shaping each others' ideas and the context itself was changing.

Rosenblatt (1938, 1978, 1980, 1986) advanced her theoretical framework as a model for practitioners to re-envision the teaching of literature. She (1980) explicitly stated guidelines for not using literary

texts to request factual information, teach decoding/reading skills, and impute there is one correct interpretation. Attention to formal text elements should be placed within the context of the total literary experience and knowledge about these elements should not be used as assessment devices. Post-reading activities should be designed with the goal of heightening the literary experience, returning to the text and providing formats for the during-reading responses.

Pedagogical implications suggest that students should have experience with a wide variety of reading materials and writing experiences. Literary and non-literary texts should be selected both by teachers and students (Hosenfeld, 1999) with the goals of finding texts which engage students in meaningful ways. Students who have a wide range of exposure will then have opportunities and motivation to read from varying stances. Educators need to develop an awareness of stance — aesthetic, efferent, and its many permutations — and incorporate this awareness when planning curriculum and instruction. Teachers need to examine the cues for stance which various learning environments elicit. They should model ways of approaching texts from different stances in order to scaffold students' reading skills.

Given the significance of the aesthetic experience for the creative spirit, teachers need to nurture the aesthetic literary experience. In spite of the recognition of the value of literature-based curricula in some school districts and perhaps because of the countervailing emphasis on standards-driven curricula, the aesthetic stance continues to be neglected or even nullified in the educational system. Children need time and space to savor the aesthetic experience and develop their own interpretations.

The student needs to be given the opportunity and courage to approach literature personally, to let it mean something to him directly. He should be made to feel that his own response to books, even though it may not seem to resemble the standard critical comments, is worth expressing (Rosenblatt, 1938, p. 81).

Additionally, educators need to reconsider current procedures for reading comprehension assessment. A student's reading comprehension level should not be evaluated as substandard on the basis of his/her providing an alternative interpretation of the text. Educators need to recognize individual variation in negotiating stance and be aware that shifts in stances across and within activities are not readily accessible for some

children and may, in fact, be in conflict. While a long-term goal is to expand students' repertoire of stances toward a text, at the same time it is important to recognize the integrity of the student who has an intense aesthetic transaction with a text and is living in the story world.

This study, in many respects, calls for us to rethink Rosenblatt beyond the continuum, to develop research which asks new questions about stance and which adds to our understanding of students' efferent and aesthetic reading.

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