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*Towards Critical Literacy:
Literature and teachers' reactions to
reader-response theories*

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R. A. Julie Brown

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Abstract

Much poststructuralist literary theory, in particular that derived from *reader-response* theories, points to the need for the development in readers of a more *critical literacy*. Earlier researchers and educators in the field of *reader-response* theories, indicated a move away from the New Critics' structuralist focus on the author's intention and a text-based meaning, to acknowledge the *active* role of the student/reader in the creation of meaning. Enlarging on the subjective role of the student/reader, later researchers, in particular the Social and Cultural theorists, introduced a more critical element by focusing on the importance of context itself. Further studies, under the influence of Foucault, developed this focus to include the idea that author, text and reader are constructed by *discourses*. A renewed awareness of how texts actually work and of the power inherent in all language, has led to the emergence of *critical literacy*.

This research, working on the premise that practice often lags behind theory, examines constraints that may inhibit the development of *critical literacy* (through teaching with literature) in the New Zealand contexts of both secondary English (including classrooms with mainstreamed ESOL¹ students) and ESOL (from a range of institutions). Two surveys, one for each teaching context, analyse teachers' reactions to concepts of *reader-response* theories with a view to determining the nature and prevalence of these constraints.

The analysis reveals that in the mainstream context, constraints emerge in the areas of curriculum design (including examination and assessment procedures), teacher education, and students' receptivity while in the ESOL context, curriculum design and teacher development are significant. The ESOL context also reveals that there

¹ ESOL: English to speakers of other languages.

is a paucity of teaching with literature in language classrooms which means that the vehicle for the development of *critical literacy*, is denied students.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

This study examines constraints that inhibit the development of critical literacy and posits the idea that through teaching with literature¹ employing a humanistic, response-theory based approach, these constraints can be overcome. The study encompasses the two contexts of both mainstream secondary English and a range of classrooms for English to speakers of other languages (ESOL), including primary, secondary and tertiary throughout New Zealand. Whether or not there are differences in the constraints between these two contexts is also examined. In summary then the following theses are proposed:

1. Teachers' use of and familiarity with reader-response theories is limited.
2. There are constraints operating in both mainstream and ESOL English classrooms preventing the development of critical literacy.
3. The constraints are different in each context.

Before outlining the chapters that follow, it is important to make three points of clarification. Firstly, a *humanistic* approach in education, is defined for the purposes of this study as stated by Peter Grundy (1994), namely "one in which the learner and learning are privileged over the subject being studied and in which respect for self and others is developed" (p. 42). Although Grundy elaborates

¹ Throughout this study I use the phrase *teaching with literature* rather than *teaching literature*. The reason for this is not to split hairs but to acknowledge the fact that literature can be used for a number of purposes and *teaching literature* can only possibly apply where there is an objective body of knowledge to impart. Further, *teaching with literature* acknowledges the move away from teacher-directed to learner-centred classrooms.

further on his own definition, and is referring to a humanistic approach in respect to language teaching only, I am satisfied that what he says here adequately covers both contexts of this study.

The second point for clarification centres on *critical literacy* per se, which is not the subject of this study. Rather, viable means of teaching towards critical literacy are what is being examined. This study is based on the personal belief that critical literacy is a desirable outcome for all students, critical literacy being the awareness that

all texts are motivated – there is no neutral position from which a text can be read or written. All language, all text, all discourse thus ‘refracts’ the world; bending, shaping, constructing particular versions of the social and natural world that act in the interests of particular class, gender, and cultural groups. (Voloshinov, 1986, cited in Muspratt, Luke and Freebody, 1997, p. 193)

The third point concerns the exploratory nature of this work, certain elements of which are close to a conceptual study. The first five chapters present much of the work undertaken and offer both an interpretation and a critical review of many key concepts, while examining some of the different approaches to teaching literature. A more traditional literature review would provide background information on research questions, highlight problems that may be encountered and outline the views and results of other researchers (Nunan, 1992). To my knowledge, no research has been carried out in the New Zealand classroom on either the development of critical literacy, or the extent to which reader-response theories are employed by teachers.

1.1 Interpretation and critical review

Chapter 2 examines teaching with literature which provides the twofold function of firstly engaging students affectively, thus making a humanistic teaching pedagogy possible, and secondly providing texts (samples of authentic discourse) which lend themselves to critical analysis. The chapter begins with a working definition of literature, drawing attention to the teacher’s purpose in selecting a

particular text, and elaborating on the three broad categories and central motifs of *text as artefact*, *text as linguistic resource* and *text as discourse*, which arose from a distinction made by A. Maley (1989) between academic *study* and linguistic resource or *use*. The question of *why* teach with literature is then examined in more detail; because the answer to this question has its genesis in historical roots, and because the major current constraint (i.e. outmoded teaching pedagogy) is linked to earlier literary theories, an historical, though far from exhaustive, overview is provided. In discussing further claims for teaching with literature, an important concept, the synonymy between language and power is introduced, thus cautioning against an uncritical approach to the worlds and behaviours *mirrored* in literature. The section that follows, dealing with teaching with literature in the ESOL context also refers to the importance of a critical approach and further investigates the beneficial link made by both Collie and Slater (1998, p. 5), and John McRae (1996, p.19) between engaging imaginatively with literature, and second language learning.

Finally, this chapter raises issues concerning teacher variables, as whether or not a teacher chooses to teach with literature in an ESOL context is dependant upon such factors as teaching philosophy, perceived classroom role, level of expertise and confidence. Both sides of the argument regarding the teacher's role and the place of interpersonal relationships in the classroom, which Carl Rogers (see H. D. Brown, 1994, p. 86) maintains is critical to the facilitation of *learning* as opposed to teacher-directed *teaching*, are also investigated. What emerges in this chapter is that literature offers a rich learning resource in both contexts for the development of critical literacy but within teaching with literature itself many constraints arise, not least being those concerned with differing theoretical stances regarding both classroom practice and literary criticism. Chapters 3 and 4 explore in some detail these theoretical stances, focusing on what are generically referred to as response theories.

Chapter 3, Response Theories, begins by setting out a distinction between personal-response, a teaching strategy that is currently pervasive throughout mainstream classrooms in New Zealand and its lesser known half-sibling, the

theoretically based reader-response. In much of the relevant literature, these two are used interchangeably but this study maintains that in clarifying a distinction between them we can come to a better understanding of a significant constraint facing teachers, namely a lack of professional development in the area of reader-response theories which the focus on personal-response has exacerbated. An examination of reader-response theories is pursued in chapter 4; meanwhile the development of personal-response from its historical beginnings in the Anglo-American 1966 Dartmouth (USA) Seminar, its influence on the changing role of teachers, its growth in the thinking and practice of New Zealand teachers, and finally its limitations regarding the development of critical literacy are examined in chapter 3.

Personal-response grew from the personal-growth model of teaching which, introduced at the Dartmouth Seminar, came to replace the functional skills model and the cultural-heritage model. The benefits inherent in the personal-growth model were those that stemmed from a new emphasis on teaching *processes* which focused on the subjective *voice* of each student. This heralded a radical move away from the well-intentioned though didactic practices of the cultural-heritage model, which through the study of so-called literary *Greats* and a *text as artefact* teaching methodology, sought the betterment of the middle and lower classes through moral instruction (see Eagleton, 1996, pp. 19-26). Key elements in the personal-growth model together with the influence at this seminar of early response theorists and educators such as James Britton and John Dixon are examined in some detail so that it becomes more apparent why personal-response has had such a huge impact on teaching practice.

However, although personal-response has had a huge impact on teaching practices in both contexts (even beyond the English classroom) and continues to guide teachers ever more towards student-centred learning, it has tended to remain trapped in a *text as artefact* approach when it comes to teaching with literature. This means that the student is not truly *active* in creating meaning as the teachers already have a single text-based meaning in their heads which students play the game of guessing at and then mimicking. What students respond to, relating

personal experiences wherever appropriate, is this teacher-determined meaning. As we will see later in 3.2 and 7.1.1, these responses *are* valued however, and the emotional growth of students *is* being facilitated but if students are not actively involved in creating and critiquing meanings for themselves (well supported by the text needless to say) then their cognitive development will be hampered and subsequently their ability to bridge the gap between a personal engagement with text and writing a transactional piece for assessment will be affected. Reader-response theories, especially those which adopt a poststructuralist approach, offer some solutions to this problem.

Chapter 4 develops further some of the strands introduced in chapter three, notably the differences and similarities between personal and reader-response and the reasons for these, which are seen to lie in their partially separate origins; in historical factors such as the earlier dominance of structuralism; and their pursuance of different pathways, teaching practice and theory respectively. When it comes to teaching with literature however, personal-response has dominated practice, even though it has created for itself the catch 22 situation of being bound to a pre-determined text-based meaning while at the same time committed to encouraging the student's *voice*. It is this bind which has rendered the student a passive participant, responding personally, even creatively, but not as far as the creation of meaning is concerned. Although reader-response theories have solutions to offer, they have not lent themselves to wide dissemination in the classroom possibly because, as Richard Beach (1993) suggests, they failed to "*specify* social and cognitive processes" (p. 3); hence a lag exists between theory and practice. This may be the case. Regardless, it is true that reader-response theories have remained in relative obscurity; this, together with the problems of personal-response, is to the detriment of the development of critical literacy. Recognising the drawbacks of personal-response, however, will provide the momentum to approach reader-response theories, central to which is the active and reflective role of the reader, who becomes cognizant of the influences surrounding *text as discourse*.

After analysing this issue, chapter 4 proceeds with a detailed examination of reader-response theories, drawing attention to ways a teacher can encourage the more *active* involvement of students with literary texts. Roland Barthes' (1988) poststructuralist concept of the death of the author making way for the birth of the reader is examined, together with discussion of three strategies Ray Misson (1994) posits as means of ensuring "some stability within the process of reading texts" (p.36), if we are to avoid solipsism.² The answers suggested lie in firstly the idea of "super readers", those who are so well informed about literary conventions that they know implicitly what the text intends (such readers are scarcely viable in a reader-response world). Secondly, Wolfgang Iser (1980) and Louise Rosenblatt (1983, 1994) both acknowledge the determinative role of the text as providing stability (see 4.2) but also insist on the importance of an active role for the reader. Iser's theory concerning "elements of indeterminacy" allows for the imaginative involvement of the reader, while Louise Rosenblatt's (1983, 1994) transactional theory of reading emphasises the "transaction" between the text and the reader as a thinking and feeling individual with a personal history, to produce the "poem" or evoked work. The third strategy for ensuring stability is to recognise, as Stanley Fish (see Beach, 1993, p.38) believes, that although the text itself is indeterminate, the reader is constrained by what Fish calls the *interpretative community* and it is this socially constructed community which collectively determines the meaning.

Fish's theory is valuable in that it introduces the role of context in what Beach (1993) describes as a "reader/text/context transaction" (p.8), and invites us to examine the role of the reader critically. In reader-response theories all three categories of reader, text, and context are involved to a greater or lesser extent in the creation of meaning, dependant largely on the degree to which they are influenced by either structuralist or poststructuralist thinking. Chapter 4 continues by examining five reader-response perspectives: Textual Theories, Experiential Theories, Psychological Theories, Social Theories and finally Cultural Theories.

² Solipsism: "Philos. The view that the self is all that exists or can be known" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary. Ninth edition, 1995).

The strengths and limitations of each are pointed out, as is the movement towards the more global effects of poststructuralism (see Beach 1993), while a case is built for the adoption of the best concepts available to assist in the development of critical literacy. Finally this chapter, looking briefly at what all this means for teachers, suggests that an eclectic and informed approach, mindful of the goal of critical literacy, will serve students well.

Chapter 5, the last in the critical review section, looks specifically at the status quo underlying *theoretical* knowledge of teaching with literature and literary theory in New Zealand, as reflected in ten years of *English in Aotearoa* publications. What emerges through the pertinent articles is a clear indication that those writers/educators mostly involved with tertiary education (such as teacher education) are not only familiar with but are also committed to advancing knowledge in the field of poststructural literary theories, several writers offering practical suggestions within the body of their papers, largely in the form of questioning strategies to assist teachers with implementing theory into practice. Although reader-response theories per se are rarely named, key concepts such as the *active reader* and the need to develop *critical competence* are. Further, one writer (Sheehan, 1996) makes a plea for an objective set of values to guide the formation of critical judgements; personal-response or feelings are “important” but are not enough on their own.

1.2 The research, results and discussion

Chapter 6, Methodology, outlines the approach to the research undertaken, which sought to investigate the status quo of *practices* underlying teaching with literature in New Zealand. Included in this chapter are details of the two questionnaires used to gather data and a section on how the data were analysed. This is followed by chapter 7, Results and Observations, which indicates certain trends, discerned through the analysis of the quantitative data, and general impressions gathered of teachers’ understanding of their practices conveyed through the use of direct quotes. In section 7.2, which presents the results of the ESOL survey, it becomes apparent that most of the data presented are more representative of secondary

schools and tertiary institutions³ than they are of primary schools or private providers. What this means is that the “range” of ESOL classrooms alluded to in the opening paragraph of this chapter, is by no means evenly distributed.

Chapter 8, Discussion, focuses on the wider issues raised by the results, in particular those which can be clearly linked to salient issues in earlier chapters regarding reader-response theories. Also in this chapter, certain broad categories of constraints emerge namely, *teacher development, curriculum, and students' receptivity* all of which are applicable to the mainstream secondary English classroom. However, in the ESOL context, only the first two apply but with different emphasis. Finally, chapter 9, Conclusion, focuses on the implications of the study.

³ Of the tertiary institutions represented, 50% were from Polytechnics, 23% were from Universities, a small 7% from Colleges of Education and the balance were unspecified.

Chapter Two

TEACHING WITH LITERATURE

*“And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.”*

(Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, V.i.13)

2.1 Introduction

For the purposes of this study, literature can be loosely defined as the expression in written form of the human imagination which finds itself in other forms in music and the visual arts. It is not possible here nor desirable to attempt a definitive understanding of what literature is, but Brian Moon (1990) in his excellent teaching resource *Studying Literature*, outlines a number of features for consideration. He cautions however that by no means is it assumed that these features are shared by all literary works which “are of many different types”, and that “many of the features we associate with literary works can be found in other types of writing as well” (p. 12). Moreover, he adds, each of these features is “subject to interpretation. ... They are defined differently in different places and at different times by different groups of people” (p. 12). Among the features listed by Moon are that literature “contains finely crafted language, offers serious themes for consideration, is imaginative and creative, offers a perceptive view of the world, uses special techniques of writing, educates as it entertains and doesn’t have a simple practical function” (p. 13).

The major written forms in reference to literature throughout this study include the largely generic forms of the novel, the short story, poetry and drama, the kinds of

literary texts which one would find in secondary classrooms throughout New Zealand. The range is wide, but the texts within it are predictable and might include those from the so-called literary canon through to contemporary publications, including texts from *pop* culture which may or may not come with an established critical reputation.

An important distinction to make, one made by Maley (1989)⁴ in regard to the wide range of literature used in schools, concerns the teacher's purpose in selecting a particular text. One text may be selected in preference to another because it is better suited to the academic *study* of text as an artefact and all this implies regarding the teaching of literary features and conventions, while another text may be selected for *use* in the classroom as a linguistic resource as is predominantly the case in ESOL classrooms.⁵ Somewhere between Maley's *study* and *use* distinction, between *text as artefact* and *text as linguistic resource*, lies a third approach, namely *text as discourse*. In this approach to teaching with literature the primary focus is neither knowledge of conventions nor the conscious development of language proficiency, both suggestive of an end point, but, rather, the growth and development of *critical literacy* which is an ongoing process.

Whatever the goals and objectives a teacher has in mind for teaching with literature, however, the question as to why to teach with literature invites further exploration.

2.2 Why literature?

Because, "England is sick ... and English literature must save it ..."

(George Gordon cited in Eagleton, 1996, p. 20)

⁴ Cited in Carter, R. and McRae, J. (1996, p. xx)

⁵ For a detailed account of this distinction made between literature for *study* and literature for *use* see the introduction to Carter and McRae (1996).

Terry Eagleton (1996), tracing the rise of English in the latter half of nineteenth century Victorian England, posits the notion that “the failure of religion” as much as any other reason gave rise to the growth of English studies, of which English literature was a growing component. If one equates both religion and literature with ideology as Eagleton does, then the arguments he puts forth are challenging if not persuasive. Without being tempted into debate or the exploration of these arguments, suffice it to say that literature did assume a value and an active role, under the influence of writers and academics such as Matthew Arnold and later, F.R. Leavis, consistent with the “humanising” of both the middle and lower classes in Britain. This literature-based humanising process embraced a range of objectives from “vicarious self-fulfilment” (though poor, you too can enjoy exotic and faraway places) to “... the instillation of national pride and the transmission of ‘moral’ values” (pp. 19-26). Further as Eagleton observes, literature, like religion, had the capacity to embody “timeless truths” arrived at through feeling and experience. What is significant here is that the very subjectivity surrounding the acquisition of these truths (a kind of blind faith) circumvented rational, objective and critical enquiry!

The answer today as to why teach with literature may still in some circles elicit the answer that it is there for our edification even that the inculcation of moral values is one of the roles of schools. However the modern view, generally accepted by English teachers in the public school system, is that literature like religion is not brought into the classroom for such didactic purposes. This is not to say that literature does not have a role to play in making moral stances available to students however. It does this and more besides, although neither current literary theory nor the recent New Zealand English curriculum document, as Geoff Sheehan (1997) points out, sufficiently “highlight the issue of ethical values” (p. 25). I agree with Sheehan who believes there is a role for ethical theories in the English classroom, arguing that “the moral choices facing characters in literature is an essential component of thinking critically” (p. 27). This aside, the important difference in the changed thinking behind the *why* of literature is one that arises in pedagogy. In

a traditional view, literature is perceived as a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, including moral precepts, from the objectified text to the collective, passive reader, whereas the more dominant, currently held view, although one not widely evident in teaching practice, is that which sees literature as a means to the creative construction of critically examined knowledge by multiple readers. Knowledge is thereby created by the reader for the reader, a process that can be carried out only if English teachers recognise the need, as Ray Misson (1994) points out, for students to learn “how texts work, [in a poststructuralist world] so that they will have control over them as far as possible” (p. 5). The current role of literature as reflected in *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (1994) affirms “the importance of literature for literacy development, for imaginative development, and for developing personal, social, cultural, historical, and national awareness and identity” (p. 16).

Earlier in the same document, in the section stating the characteristics of learning and teaching, thinking critically is highlighted with the elaboration that “all learners should develop the ability to discriminate and respond critically to a wide range of ... texts, including imaginative literature” (p. 12). One can not help but wonder why critical thinking is sidelined as a process in this way and not included as a goal in the general statement about the current role of literature.⁶

2.3 Further claims for literature

So far I have been speaking about literature in fairly general terms suggesting that the *why* of teaching with literature is closely linked to *how* literature should be taught. Although it is not my aim to exhaust the special characteristics of literature or to list the number of possible reasons for teaching with literature, there are

⁶ The answer possibly lies in a lack of clarity over the meaning of *critical* or even a reluctance to accept that *critical literacy* is a desirable goal. This issue is briefly discussed later under Results 7.1.1.

claims that can be made regarding literature which, on examination, provide further rationale for the *study* or *use* of literature or a combination of both these.

Writers of literary texts are the observers and thinkers of an age, dealing with a diverse range of subjects and problems which as Rosenblatt (1983) points out, are “usually thought of as the province of the sociologist, psychologist, philosopher, or historian” (p. 5). Through their work, writers make it possible to engage not only with what is familiar but with those ideas we have never thought about before and in so doing create for ourselves the potential for choice. Literature enriches our lives, both through the pure enjoyment gained from leisure reading and through the insights made possible, into the lives and societies of both similar and dissimilar others. Literary texts *mirror* human behaviour, reflecting situations for our scrutiny, a critical scrutiny in a reader-response world however, cognizant of the possible distorting properties of a mirror lens so that we learn that characters in a fictional world are constructions of reality, subject to the shaping influences of context as indeed we the readers in our own social, cultural and political contexts are. Further, through literature we can come to recognise the power of language to reflect dominant social ideologies and in this recognition encourage challenge and debate.

Finally, before looking at some reasons for teaching with literature in an ESOL context, it would be interesting to consider a curriculum devoid of literature, particularly if we agree with Henry James (cited in Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 6), that the province of literature is so vast as to include “all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision.” Besides, on a slightly less expansive level, where else in the curriculum can we find the peculiar blend of emotion, the encouragement of empathy and compassion, exposure to the foibles and complexities of human behaviour, *and* the potential for the development of critical reason?

2.4 Why teach with literature in the ESOL classroom?

Over the years, literature has slipped in and out of favour in the language classroom with a return to popularity in the eighties, explained by a combination

of factors. McRae (1996), for one, states that “since the early 1980s there has been a strong theoretical undercurrent advocating the use of literature in language teaching” (pp. 16-17), through the work of H.G. Widdowson, (1975; 1984) who McRae sees as having “raised the fundamental issues” which were then “developed, examined, and amplified, most significantly in Brumfit and Carter [1986], Carter and Long [1991], Duff and Maley [1991], McRae [1991] and Widdowson [1992]” (p. 17). A further factor is that perceived by Alan Hirvela (1996) who states that the personal-response approach (derived from the personal-growth model of teaching as outlined by Dixon, 1972, p. 4), “has played a major role in literature’s return to acceptability” (p. 127). And finally, inseparable in fact from Widdowson’s work, was the growth of the communicative language teaching (CLT) movement which, as Hirvela also points out, “came to literature in its search for more communicatively-orientated materials and learning conditions” (p. 127).

Among the many popular literature-based CLT texts which emerged at this time was Collie and Slater’s (1988) *Literature in the Language Classroom*, which outlines four reasons for teaching with literature, significant in the light of there being “no specific examination requirement to do so ...” (p. 3). Together with “valuable authentic material”, “cultural enrichment” and “language enrichment”, Collie and Slater stress above all “personal involvement” which, through the engagement of the imagination “enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system” (p. 5). The function of the imagination plays a central role in the thinking of many advocates for the use of literature. For example, McRae (1996), supportive of an approach to literature that privileges language, believing that “The language/literature interface is probably the richest vein of learning potential for learners at all levels of language, and indeed of Literature study” (p. 23), also maintains that “the development of language competence in a learner has to allow for imaginative interaction, for an element of creativity, and for an affective element of subjective, personal development ” (p. 19).

I need to point out here that McRae makes a distinction between Literature with a capital 'L' to refer to Literature as a specialist study, that is *text as artefact*, and literature with a small 'l' which as Ronald Carter (1996) points out refers to "texts not normally considered to be literary ... [such as] advertisements, jokes, puns, etc ... texts which however have aspects of literariness inherent in them" (p. 7), *texts as discourse* in other words.

Text as linguistic resource is undoubtedly the major aim behind most language teachers' bringing literature into the classroom. This was found to be the case by Christopher Brumfit and Michael Benton (1993), who carried out an impressionistic (by necessity) survey on nineteen papers from authors, all "teachers of English literature ... appointed to posts in which teaching literature is a significant part of their work" (pp. 4-5) from Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, representing in total eighteen countries. Wishing to indicate concerns associated with particular levels in education they found that

there is a striking tendency for creative, cultural and affective factors to group themselves in the non-university sector, and for formal textual analysis, as well as theory, to be found in universities. What is overwhelmingly clear, though, is the strength of the language factor in comparison with the others. Most authors are explicitly concerned with this, and some use literature exclusively for linguistic purposes. (p. 5)

The following response to the question as to why to use literature in the language classroom gives a student's perspective and lends support to the findings of Brumfit and Benton. Moreover, it specifies a value for both the use of authentic texts⁷ and for vocabulary learning. Tim Brown (personal communication, June, 1998), a learner of four languages at secondary and university levels replied

⁷ Authentic texts meaning those texts, either fiction or non-fiction that have not been created with specific language teaching objectives (such as points of grammar) as their aim.

Well, for me the two biggest arguments are still (1) the importance of authentic teaching material and (2) the importance of context. For a language learner, authentic material is a must. So often in a language class have I wasted energy learning words and phrases that aren't really used by L1 speakers. The advantage for the learner in using authentic texts is that you can have confidence in the usefulness of the new vocabulary. Also, authentic material is just so much more interesting than inauthentic material in that it provides a window through which to view another culture. But what is additionally important is that the learner learns an L2 for a purpose, and one purpose is to be able to read literature in the target language. It's not just learning for the sake of learning!

As far as context is concerned a new piece of vocabulary is much more powerful when learnt in a context. The learning is more deeply embedded as the context conveys information about level of language, and appropriateness of use, not to mention denotation and connotation! And what greater context than an entire novel?

Despite the obvious emphasis placed on *text as linguistic resource* by those language teachers who do teach with literature and the apparent benefits to students as seen above, there are indications from John McRae (1996), for one, that literature has more to offer in the *text as discourse* role which, to reiterate, supports the growth and development of critical literacy. Although McRae emphasises the language/literature interface, he nevertheless stresses that language production, the

controlled open response ... is one of the main aims of the language teacher ... and in this context language learning is moving beyond the traditional four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing to the deployment of the indispensable but often ignored or taken-for-granted fifth skill, *thinking* ... which involves conceptualising, and ... sooner or later, working with ideas. (pp. 22-23, italics added)

McRae does not refer to *critical* thinking, but he does caution against the “danger of abstraction” which he says can be controlled “if the focus is kept on language” (p. 23). Another way to deal with abstraction is to be less concerned about control and to focus instead on critical thinking strategies such as the student’s own reading processes and awareness about the socio-political configurations of every text. Provided texts are thoughtfully selected to match, for one, the language proficiency level of the students, then literature and literary texts as defined by McRae (see earlier section 2.4), offer ESOL students a complete language-learning resource, one encompassing critical literacy.

2.5 Teacher variables in the ESOL context

Whether one uses literature in the language classroom or not is dependant upon both the teacher’s educational philosophy and perceived classroom role. If the second language teacher tends towards a humanistic approach and sees the teacher’s role as that of an educator,⁸ then concern will be with the growth and development of the whole student, that is the affective together with the cognitive. H. Douglas Brown (1994), elaborating on the language teacher’s role, draws on the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers to make the point that there is a move away from “teaching” as such toward “learning” which he says, puts teachers in the role of “facilitators of learning, and one can only facilitate by establishing an interpersonal relationship with the learner” (p. 86). To establish this relationship, teachers need to create an environment of mutual respect and trust. John Dixon (1972) viewing trust as an essential factor in this process, points out that

all of us test the validity of what we have said by sensing how far others that we trust have shared our response. An English teacher tries to be a person to whom pupils turn with that sense of trust. (p. 8)

⁸ as opposed to a language instructor, a distinction made by R.A. Jacobs (1994, pp. 30-31)

Teaching with literature, needless to say, through such teaching strategies as personal-response to engage students with the affective or emotional side of human nature, is one certain way of creating the environment for this relationship of trust to occur.

Two issues arise here which need closer examination. Firstly, in an environment where the teacher functions as a facilitator, much more emphasis is placed on learner autonomy which in the case of some students may require considerable time, patience and some clarification of different teaching/learning styles; the habits of previous learning experiences are not easy to let go. However, I agree entirely with John McRae (1996) who states that “learner autonomy has to be one of the teacher’s aims at all times. The teacher’s supportive role is as an enabler and confidence-builder, indicating ways towards autonomy and self evaluation” (p. 31). The teacher’s role is also, one might add, to model an attitude of enquiry towards learning that is both positive and ongoing; such an attitude I believe to be central to the development of autonomy.

Barbara Sinclair (1996) relates learner autonomy specifically to literature teaching and, apart from the more obvious aim of encouraging students to develop an interest in reading that will lead them to selecting their own texts for independent reading, she suggests that the very nature of literature “implies a focus on the individual reader by demanding *that* reader’s response and personal interaction with the text” (p. 141, italics added). Further, Sinclair states that because literature contains a world of emotion and experience, it “can promote the development of the individual as a whole person, providing access to new and different experiences, feelings, desires and creative impulses” (p. 141). However, I hasten to add in relation to Sinclair’s first statement here, that the teacher’s approach to teaching with literature remains a critical factor as we cannot assume that an individual and active reader is implied automatically. Many teachers teach as they were taught, that is in the traditional mode, viewing a text as an objective body of knowledge, unaware that there may be a role for students in creating their own meanings.

So far I have emphasised the importance of the language teacher adopting a more holistic approach, one which is concerned with the growth and development of the whole student and which entails the establishment of teacher/student relationships based in such affective principles as respect and trust. Further, literature, because of its concern with the human condition, opens the way for the development of such relationships. As the teacher/student relationship consolidates, the teacher is then able to become less directive and more facilitative while students assume certain responsibilities for their own learning. This gives rise to the issue of learner autonomy, which can only be seen as beneficial. However, not all educators believe that it is the role of the language teacher to engage students on a personal level, which brings me to the second issue.

This issue is more open to debate and concerns whether or not engaging students in the emotional complexities of existence, through personal reflections in response to literature, and the establishment of an interpersonal teacher/student relationship, is properly the domain of the language teacher. Nick Gadd (1998) believes that “students attend English classes ... because they want access to the teacher’s expertise about language” (p. 243). And further, he adds the impassioned and somewhat overstated view that, “if students want to explore their inner selves, improve their personalities, or seek more moral guidance, there are plenty of available priests, philosophers and counsellors” (p. 243).

Gadd does not altogether decry humanism however, and is supportive of E. W. Stevick whom he sees as promoting a “pragmatic humanism”, calling for the need for teachers to understand their students’ “motivations, attitudes, reactions, and cognitive strengths and weaknesses – in short, their psychology” (p. 233). Anything beyond this however, he dismisses as “romantic humanism”, including the development of interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. My question to Gadd would be to ask him how he approaches teaching with literature, if he teaches literature at all. I suspect not, as his teaching preference is, as he indicates, for an integration of pragmatic humanism which he concedes “can be a useful part of the teacher’s armoury” and “an approach outlined by the genre theorists, which requires us to turn our attention to the great diversity of language

in the public sphere. These include the worlds of factual knowledge, business, politics, and community debate” (p. 233). As H. D. Brown (1994) expresses it, the role of the teacher, from Gadd’s perspective, is from “a superior vantage point where what is to be taught is decided by the teacher unilaterally” (p. 86).

The issues raised by Gadd are debated by Jane Arnold (1998, pp. 235-242) and Gadd’s occasional lapses into emotive language aside, these two papers, together with Gadd’s (1998) *Reply to Jane Arnold*, present a worthwhile and informative “point/counterpoint” examination of this perennial issue. Regardless of the arguments however, and in fact what they are illustrative of, is that a teacher’s personal philosophy remains of key importance as stated at the outset.

Further to personal philosophy and perceived role, other factors such as the language teacher’s personal appreciation of literature and level of confidence may also determine the use or otherwise of literature. Level of confidence may or may not be related to academic background and expertise, but may relate to the assumption that literature is the study of *text as artefact*, and in this approach to literature there is the attendant metalanguage that can be daunting to language teachers and, by extension, their students. This of course links closely with the Maley distinction between *study* and *use* referred to earlier, and reinforces the notion that unless the language teacher is able to approach literature freed from the constraints imposed by a traditional view of *Literature*, students are denied what Jacobs (1994) calls

the special humanistic dimension ... learning to see a world through another’s eyes, experiencing the clash of human values and a different kind of living, discovering that others speaking very different languages and living in very different societies are much more like us than we might think ... All this is a crucial part of a true education, but an expendable luxury if we see ourselves as providing training rather than education. (p. 33)

2.6 Summary

Literature offers a rich resource for language development, personal growth, and the development of critical literacy for both mainstream and ESOL students. Central to teaching with literature in both these contexts is the teaching *approach* employed by teachers which, as seen, is affected by several factors such as whether or not the teacher views literature as an artefact, as a linguistic resource, or as discourse to be examined critically. Other factors are those connected to a teacher's personal philosophy, her/his confidence, and level of commitment to literature.

This study explores the viability of using approaches based in a humanistic philosophy, in particular what may generically be referred to as response theories. Chapter 2 has examined some of the developments in approaches to teaching with literature and the following chapter analyses these further with a view to coming some way to understanding what theories have informed the teaching with literature in New Zealand, the background to these, and their limitations in respect to the development of critical literacy.

Chapter Three

RESPONSE THEORIES

Certain response theories have found their way into classroom practice (i.e. personal-response theories) while others, arguably in the light of critical literacy the most important, have remained locked away in theory (i.e. reader-response theories). For many, reader-response and personal-response are one and the same, but they might better be conceptualised as half-siblings as a close look at personal-response, its origins and its function in the classroom reveals telling differences. It is important to this study to clarify these differences because the assumption that they are the same creates two problems. Firstly, it denies teachers access to the theoretical knowledge embodied in reader-response theories, and secondly, in employing a loosely conceived notion of personal-response, one that habitually remains bound to the authority of *text as artefact*, teachers will not in fact take students very far towards critical literacy.

3.1 Personal-response. Where did it come from?

The teacher ... is bound by professional convention to oppose student involvement with the text, 'identification with the hero,' and the like. The student may 'identify,' God forgive him, on his own time, but please to keep the muck of your life out of my classroom. (Cited in Squires, 1968, p. 35)

It was in reaction to such beliefs as those expressed above, which typified the strict formalism of the New Criticism that held sway in classrooms and universities from the late 30s through to the early 60s, and through the growing influence of humanism and new theories emerging from a range of disciplines including linguistics, that interest in the student (the *person*) and her/his *voice*, became more widespread. A turning point in the thinking of many educators in English undoubtedly came after the eventful, month-long, Anglo-American, Dartmouth (USA) Seminar in 1966, where among other topics of critical concern to the fifty

participants,⁹ models of English teaching practice were closely scrutinised. British educator and researcher, John Dixon (1972) in the second edition of his *Growth through English*, a report synthesising the joint discussions held at the seminar, reveals the limitations of both the skills model, which focused on functional literacy as its prime concern, thus ignoring a huge amount of the terrain that is English, and the cultural heritage model, which was founded on the belief that through the study of the *best* (adult) literature “all that was best in national thought and feeling could be handed on”, Dixon adds somewhat scathingly, “to a generation that knew largely slums and economic depression” (p. 3). Dixon further points out that in this model any notion of culture as the student might know it, “a network of attitudes to experience and personal evaluations that he develops in a living response to family and neighbourhood” (p. 3), was generally ignored. Rather, culture resided in selected literary texts which were considered sacrosanct, an embodiment besides of moral truths and principles existing for the betterment of individual behaviour. In such a paternalistic climate, English was the study of literary *Greats* and the student’s *voice* was simply never a consideration.

Slowly, during the later 60s, cultural heritage gave way to a third model, namely language and personal-growth which was less concerned with *what* English is as it was with *how* English should be taught that is with *process*: it focused “on the need to re-examine the learning processes and the meaning to the individual of what he is doing in English lessons” (Dixon, 1972, p. 1-2). The key elements in this model, which then proceeded to exert an influence on English teaching practice, including as far as the antipodes were, firstly, the value put on shared personal experiences which are brought to life through such language activities as personal story telling, class discussions (the emphasis here being on talk/oracy), and writing diaries; secondly, the promotion of interaction between teacher and students. Consequently, as Dixon points out, a far more complex relationship than that teachers previously experienced with their students developed. The concept of

⁹ Incidentally, in Dixon’s description of the seminar participants, it was noted that not a single delegate represented New Zealand.

English for classroom study broadened through the influence of the personal-growth model, to encompass the student and her/his world and language. As explained by Dixon, English is “the meeting point of experience, language and society” (p. 85). Moreover, he adds, citing Whitehead, it implies “a developmental pattern whose origin and momentum come from outside the school situation, and which is intimately bound up with the individual’s whole intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual growth” (p.85). Theoretically at least, English as a subject was growing rapidly under such humanistic approaches in education and to be referred to as *the poor man’s classics* would have been an example of political incorrectness if such a term existed in the 60s.

Through the new focus on the individual’s world and language (Dixon) and influenced by modern linguistic research, came also the need to acknowledge that standard English, which was the medium of all books used in the classroom, was “a major hurdle for young children with a strong local or social dialect” (Dixon, 1972, p. 16), and so this necessitated their engaging in language switching.¹⁰ In terms of written language this did not present such a problem, there being basically one standard written form in both American and British English (including the Commonwealth countries), but even so problems arise here, and as Dixon asks, through the illustration of a sample of highly personal though grammatically flawed writing from a pubescent West Indian student (representative of a growing sector of primary and secondary school populations throughout Britain), what is more important, the experience or the “correctness” of her English? In a personal-growth model, the answer is obvious: “Whatever our attitude to the forms of language, spoken or written, we have to leave the way open for things of importance to be said” (Dixon, 1972, p. 18).

¹⁰ Language switching meaning: moving from one language or dialect used at home to another for the school environment. When the mother tongue is a totally different language from that of both the wider community and the formal language requirements of the schools, the problem is further magnified.

James Britton (1968), also a British educator, classroom researcher, and an early reader-response theorist, in his Dartmouth paper entitled *Response To Literature*, raises the more direct connection of personal-response to literary texts in asking whether “the naive responses of children to texts that would infuriate more ‘sophisticated’ readers”, are not in fact “the tender shoots that must be fostered if there is to be a flower at all” (pp. 3-4)? Britton expresses the view that these “tender shoots” form the foundation of literary responses which a teacher builds up through close analysis of the literary text:

Progress lies in perceiving gradually more complex patterns of events ... perceiving the form of the varying relationships between elements in the story and reality, as increasingly they come to know that commodity ... but the form of language itself – its words with their meanings and associations, its syntax, its sounds and rhythms, its images – these contribute to the total form, not as fringe benefits but as inseparable elements of a single effect. (pp. 4-5)

Britton’s concept of personal-response can be seen as a hybrid derived from the formal approach of New Criticism and the hegemony it gave to literary texts, and the student’s free licence to express any view.¹¹ Personal-response must be disciplined Britton insists, but, “even the most disciplined responses of two different persons must reflect something of their individual differences” (p. 7). Individual difference is implicit in the word *response*, more readily grasped when seen alongside the word *answer* which almost by definition, certainly in both the skills and cultural heritage models, implied right or wrong. Such a black and white binary, might be effective in the training of obedience and the inculcation of so called *correct* thinking, but its very insistence surely has the potential to curb a developing mind. The strength and benefits inherent in a personal-response approach are those derived from there being no right or wrong but a world full of

¹¹ This was experimented with by I. A. Richards who, “during the 1920s ... had asked his Cambridge students to ‘respond freely’ to poetry read in his classes” (Beach, 1993, p. 16).

differences.

The study group report following Britton's paper, and chaired by D.W Harding, also an early reader-response theorist, came to a consensus, agreeing that personal-response was not "free floating or merely emotional as there is something 'out there' which provides a referent to test the fidelity of the perceiver's responses" (Squire, 1968, p. 23). At the same time the study group warned against "the dryness of schematic analysis" reminding readers that, "it is literature, not literary criticism which is the subject" (p. 26). The development of affective responses to achieve a "discriminating enjoyment" of literature should be the teachers' aim. The group believed that discrimination would grow through repeated exposure to the *best* literary models and close reading activities in the classroom, as well as through wide reading undertaken by the student.

3.2 The New Zealand context

In August 1969, in response to a growing concern over the inadequacies of an English syllabus forms 3 to 5 that had not been modified since its inception in 1945, the Director of Secondary Education initiated New Zealand's equivalent of the Dartmouth Seminar. This conference gave rise to the establishment of the National English Syllabus Committee (NESC) that began work in 1970 and whose brief was to revise the existing syllabus, prepare a handbook for teachers, and prepare a report on these activities for submission to the Minister of Education. Not until May, 1982, after more than a decade of research, trials in schools followed by reports, and a last minute reworking of syllabus guidelines to reflect changed times, was the new syllabus in English forms 3 to 5 based on the NESC Statement of Aims, approved by the Minister.¹²

¹² For a detailed account of the work carried out by the NESC and commentary on influences in the affective domain of New Zealanders Sylvia Ashton Warner and Elwyn Richardson, see Catherwood, Rathgen & Aitken (1990).

The Post-Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) review, published in 1969 and entitled *Education in Change*, stated an educational aim which the NESC adopted, seeing it "as being compatible with emerging theory about the nature and significance of language development in adolescents" (*Developing a New English Syllabus*, 1983, p. 4). The NESC, having studied the research findings of Chomsky, Purves and others and related their work to the classroom research work of Britton, Dixon, Stratta, Wilkinson and Barnes which showed "that the development of competence in reading and writing depends on the development of the skills of speaking and listening" (*Resource Book, English, Forms 3-5*, 1983, p. 8), adopted the concept of oracy as one of the key elements in their evolving guidelines. They saw the changing role of teachers as one that would "value 'talk' ... in situations which ensured that the students assimilated and developed ideas in their own language, at their own pace ... and they were to realise the importance of interaction between student and teacher" (*Developing a New English Syllabus*, 1983, p. 4). Moreover, "students were to be encouraged to select their own ways of working and *be allowed to explore ideas without having to reach pre-conceived conclusions*" (pp. 5-6, italics added).

It is not possible to pinpoint one moment when personal-response entered the thinking of the NESC, but in the emphasis given by the committee throughout this period to developing teaching techniques that would best enhance students' language development, the *voice* of the student, spoken and written, was to be valued and encouraged. Further, along with the value put on the student, there developed an awareness of the heterogeneous nature of school populations and of individual student needs so that another of the key tenets of the new English syllabus was that "the needs and abilities of students from language backgrounds other than English were to be more adequately provided for" (p. 3).

Following the publication in 1984 of both the NESC *Statement of Aims* and the *Resource Book, English: Forms 3 to 5*, together with other influences in the early 80s, English teaching in New Zealand was, as expressed by Elody Rathgen (personal communication, July 27, 1998), teacher and educator from Canterbury University, "awash with personal-response". Among the more notable influences

at this time were Australians Ken Watson from the University of Sydney and Bill Corcoran from James Cook University in Northern Queensland; the August 1980 Third International Conference on the Teaching of English in Australia, Sydney, which was attended by “over one hundred teachers from New Zealand” (Catherwood et al. 1990, p.195); finally the establishment of the New Zealand Association of Teachers of English (NZATE). Personal-response was given further impetus through the development of process writing which became even more deeply entrenched in teaching practice through the establishment of the New Zealand Writing Project in July 1987; personal writing more readily recognised today as expressive writing (Britton’s original term), became a genre with assessment criteria peculiar to it alone. Not only writing but, speaking, listening and reading functions throughout *English In The New Zealand Curriculum* (1994) all contain achievement objectives from level one through to level eight, which require students to

respond to texts relating them to personal experience; draw on personal background, knowledge and experience; recount experiences; read with enjoyment for personal development; record personal experiences; develop a personal voice; and express complex thoughts in a personal voice. (pp. 28-36)

These are only a few examples typical of the many that permeate this document and are testimony to the fact that the personal-growth model and its various permutations are central to current English teaching in New Zealand.

3.3 The limitations of personal-response

A personal-growth model moving towards even more student-centred learning practices through the extensive use of personal-response, is an apt description of English teaching in New Zealand schools today. However, in respect to teaching with literature (which for senior students in particular necessitates the production of transactional writing for assessment), personal-response based on personal experience, is not enough on its own to engender the critical literacy skills and/or

cognitive growth¹³ needed. Incidentally, in order to accommodate the affective, the more creatively focussed personal-growth model had moved away from cognitive growth. This change in emphasis can be understood as a reaction to, what John Dixon's 1972 Dartmouth report describes as, "the traditional emphasis on cognitive growth (in ways of thinking) [which] tends to focus attention away from the equally important stages in the accommodation to modes of feeling, judging and evaluating that characterizes the reading of literature (including personal writing)" (p. 90).

Sandra Stotsky (1995) discussing several empirical studies carried out on the use of personal-response in the literature class, (U.S.A. secondary students) concludes that "the studies that have been done do not show clearly that when students are asked to make personal connections, the effects on literary learning are better than when they are not asked to do so" (p. 768). "Literary learning", in each of the studies Stotsky refers to, is measured by an analysis of the students' responses to literature written in each study following the teacher's particular treatment of the personal-response approach. I tend to agree with Stotsky when she says that "what needs clarification in these studies is the role of reading ability itself" (p. 768). Discussing the use of personalised writing¹⁴ in academic journals in classrooms in some content areas (for example Geography and Science) throughout the United States, Stotsky adds that

it is premature to judge definitively the worth of personalised writing in the content areas. ... But concept development may not take place if students do not move from personal experience to focus on the concept and, instead,

¹³Cognitive: i.e. *thinking* as distinct from *emotion*, therefore objectivity rather than subjectivity.

¹⁴ Stotsky uses the term *personalised* to "refer to the writing assignment in the literature or content area class that urges students to bring their life experiences to the interpretation of what they are reading (or viewing) and to ground their understanding of what they are reading (or viewing) in them" (p. 761).

continue to mesh personal experience with the concept or end up focussing chiefly on personal experience. (p. 769)

Stotsky's paper is thought-provoking, covering a range of concepts, and it is this last observation that touches on a problem certain students appear to have when it comes to bridging their personal-responses, written in journals throughout a period of literary text study, and the transactional writing assessment task. What is required is for students to step aside from personal experience and find in their reading a coherent pattern of meaning that expresses abstract concepts. Personal-response may be beneficial to the writing of narratives, as indeed it is as a means of engaging students with literary texts, but responding personally and with discrimination or *discipline*, so as to produce informed literary analysis, creates a tension, even a dichotomy, especially if, as is believed to be the case, many teachers remain aligned to a *text as artefact* approach; the pressure of assessment and examinations encourages the guiding of personal-response towards a pre-determined text-based teacher interpretation. This creates a quandary for some students, who on the one hand are encouraged to give full vent to personal-response which transcends right and wrong, but on the other, know that certain personal responses/experiences will be seen as more relevant and that certain interpretations will score better grades.¹⁵

The problem does not altogether stem from the demands of examination systems however, but lies also in pedagogical considerations. There is no denying the affective benefits inherent in a personal-growth model and the oral and written use of personal-response; in terms of learning processes, there is the need to develop Britton's "tender shoots", as students from as early an age as possible need practice at the creative/imaginative expression of ideas. Besides, this practice will

¹⁵ This dilemma was recognised both at Dartmouth where an enquiry into examinations was carried out (see Dixon, 1972, pp. 92-94), and in New Zealand where the NESC initiated a review of examinations which culminated in reference testing and internal assessment (see *Developing a new English Syllabus*, 1983, pp. 10-14).

surely assist the growth of cognition needed for discriminatory analysis. Gertrude Moskowitz (1994), a foreign language educator noted for the emphasis she gives humanistic teaching, cites E. W. Stevick who claims that “our imagining equipment is intimately associated with our remembering equipment” (p. 10). But personal-response untempered by critical literacy skills can lead students to the kind of subjective criticism described by David Bleich (1978) where a literary essay, on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* for example, can become a richly introspective psychological study of the writer’s relationships, not least being that experienced with the parent of the opposite sex! There is a place for this but it’s not in the English classroom. What is needed in the English classroom is a more eclectic approach.

3.4 Summary

To conceptualise response theories as personal-response is beneficial to teachers in that a range of knowledge regarding developments in approaches to teaching with literature becomes more accessible. Personal-response offers the following benefits:

1. It focuses teachers on the humanistic principles of student-centred learning.
2. It puts emphasis on the importance of the affective domain in learning processes, in particular the role of the creative imagination.
3. It validates students through the acknowledgment of their experiences and responses.
4. It offers certain students, possibly the less able readers, a way into literary texts.
5. Personal-response, in acknowledging the student’s *voice*, marks the beginnings of the movement away from the didactic and paternalistic

practices of the New Critics in their formalistic approach to teaching *text as artefact*.

There are limitations inherent in personal-response, however, if it is used solely as an approach to teaching with literature. There is a problem also in that there is no evidence to suggest that personalised writing (equated here with personal journal responses) assists in the writing of transactional literary responses which require the development of cognition and abstract concepts; in fact a personal-response approach may be problematic for certain students as Stotsky's (1995) study suggests.

It is the argument of this thesis that students need to be encouraged to reflect objectively on their responses, to make critical judgments about their reading, and in so doing they will arrive at meanings that are both significant to them and well supported by the text. While personal-response offers a way into literature, it fails to offer teachers the knowledge they need to facilitate cognitive growth and herein lies the major difference between personal and reader-response. The following chapter highlights this and further differences and similarities between these two forms of response theories, offers a possible explanation for the differences and conveys in some detail the development and range of reader-response theories.

Chapter Four

READER-RESPONSE THEORIES

As suggested in the previous chapter, reader-response theories have something to offer teachers that will assist with the cognitive growth of students and their development towards critical literacy, neither of which is met by personal-response alone. This chapter examines the extensive range of reader-response theories, their limitations, and what each has to offer, after first commenting on further differences and similarities between personal and reader-response and offering a possible explanation as to why they are different.

4.1 Differences and similarities

Only one parent in common goes part way as an explanation as to why these two closely related response theories are both similar and different. Whereas personal-response grew, as we have seen in the foregoing chapter, from classroom practice and a more holistic view of the language-needs of the individual, reader-response arose through the process of slow evolution in the field of literary theory and criticism. Despite their divergence into teaching practice and theory respectively, they do however have one guiding principle in common, namely their categorical rejection of the so called *affective fallacy* which, in dismissing the reader's subjective role, gave literary texts the autonomy they enjoyed under New Criticism. Reader-response theorists believed that meaning of a literary text could only be arrived at through the active transaction (Rosenblatt, 1994) between the reader and the text, thus giving power to the reader in the creation of meaning, while those who used a personal-response approach believed that a student's emotional and subjective response to a literary text was the best beginning on which to build knowledge of textual analysis. A shared value placed in affective response, then, is what they have in common but the ways this response is perceived and employed are quite different.

In a personal-response approach the reader remains passive insofar as the meaning of the text is understood to be predetermined, so that what in fact students are responding to as Alan Hirvela (1996) suggests, are “generally reactions to something in the text, giving the text a position of authority within the learner-text interaction” (p. 128). As far as the ESOL learner is concerned, says Hirvela, “communicative goals are served, because learners must generate their own discourse in order to express their [personal] responses” (p. 128). This satisfies the learning goals of a *text as linguistic resource* approach but, as no value is placed on the reader’s *active* role in the creation of meaning, ESOL students, as with their mainstream counterparts, are denied access to the kind of thinking that will lead towards critical literacy. Strictly speaking then, the affective fallacy is more critically challenged by reader-response. Personal-response values the student’s subjective involvement without going so far as to examine and include the theories behind the reading process and factors that have a bearing on individual perception. Britton and colleagues talked about a “disciplined” response, but failed to state clearly how this was to be developed other than through exposure to the *best* literature, and exercises designed around a conventional *text as artefact* approach to teaching literature. The reasons for this are historical in that the early theorists, like Britton, were very much under the influence of Saussurean linguistics, in particular semiotics and structuralism, which had played an integral role in defining New Criticism.

It is pertinent to point out at this stage that reader-response theory has made little impact on teaching practice, possibly as Beach (1993) suggests “because, with the exception of Rosenblatt, Purves, Probst, Bleich, McCormick, and a few others, there has been little systematic attempt to translate theory into practice” (p. 3). Beach draws a comparison here with the influence exerted by contemporary theories of writing on teaching practice, “because they specify the processes, both cognitive and social” (p. 3). Beach may well be correct in thinking this although I don’t believe it takes a great deal of “translation” for the implementation of theoretical concepts. What is required more significantly, is a change in the mindset of the teacher through exposure to new ideas. In the meantime personal-

response has dominated practice. Perhaps the fact that it was initially concerned with the language needs of the individual, and with the processes of learning in *real* classroom environments and with *real* students, explains its ready assimilation by teachers and its pervasive use in literature teaching methodologies today. The over-emphasis on subjectivity however has created problems which may be overcome through the adoption of the best that reader-response, with its emphasis on the *active* reader, has to offer. The development of reader-response theories and how students might actively create meaning is examined in the following section.

4.2 Active readers

"Where is the song before it is sung?" Where indeed?

"No where," is the answer. One creates the song by singing it. (Alexander Herzen)¹⁶

As with all literary criticism, the chief concern of reader-response criticism is the *meaning* of the text. Unlike other theorists, however, reader-response theorists believe that meaning is created by the reader; it is neither inherent in the text itself, as was believed by the New Critics, nor is it discovered through an examination of the author's biography, as was commonly held by not just the Romantics but also by many traditional literary theorists. This anti-intentionalist stance (i.e. the dismissal of the author's role in shaping meaning) has had a major influence on literary criticism for the past thirty years and owes much of its development to the later poststructuralist work of Roland Barthes (1988), most notably his famous essay written in 1968, *The death of the author* in which he proclaimed that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (p. 172). The major implication here, as Ray Misson (1994) points out, is that "a notion of the author's authority over a text functions to limit the possible meaning: the author must be got rid of for the reader to come into her/his own" (p. 35). What this

¹⁶ Cited in the *New York Review*, May 14, 1998.

means in Barthes' terms is that a multiplicity of readings becomes possible. Focus on the reader as the creator of meaning has become the central tenet of all reader-response theories, although, as will be seen later, the degree of focus on the reader varies considerably among theorists, as text and context are also taken into account.

It is in this very shift of focus to an active reader however that accusations of solipsism can arise (see Misson 1994). Teachers, of course, operating within the requirements of the English curriculum, would not accept personal-response alone as an assessment piece of transactional writing but try to encourage the validation of ideas, based on a developing knowledge of literary text conventions. However, in reader-response criticism the question Misson raises, "what is it that limits the bounds of possible readings?" (p. 36), still needs to be answered. There are, Misson says, "various answers given, but all of the reader-response theorists in the end posit something that will ensure some stability within the process of reading texts" (p. 36).

Of three strategies outlined by Misson, the first, namely "to posit an ideal reader of some kind, an 'implied reader', an 'informed reader', even a 'super reader'" (p. 36), becomes untenable in the ideal of reader-response theory in that the reader here is simply an extension of the text; thus there is no provision for individualised response. However, in the real world of the classroom such either/or situations are unrealistic and what is desirable under the current curriculum is a reader who becomes increasingly skilled at detecting the devices authors use to make texts work. Robert Probst (1988), in defence of reader-response theory reminds us of the *active* reader who "creates himself *intellectually* as he reads ..." and is "both a participant, feeling and thinking, and an observer, watching himself feel and think" (p. 24, italics added). There is a further consideration however, concerning the notion of the reader per se and this as Beach (1993) points out stems from the later more committed poststructuralist response theorists, who "conceive of 'actual' readers as themselves constructed by various institutional discourses" (p. 6). More on this later.

The second strategy or set of strategies noted by Misson

involves seeing reading as a process which is guided by the text, but in which the reader must bring her/his own experience to bear in order to fill out what the text offers and produce the final aesthetic object. (p. 37)

Two influential theorists, both concerned in their own way with the realisation of text through the reading process are the reception theorist, Wolfgang Iser and educator and researcher, Louise Rosenblatt.

The first of these I shall discuss is Iser (1980) who, building on the phenomenological theories of George Poulet and Roman Ingarden,¹⁷ saw the reading process as the “coming together of text and [the reader’s] imagination” (p. 54). Iser, acknowledging certain of Laurence Sterne’s remarks in *Tristram Shandy*, points out that

a literary text is something like an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination. If the reader were given the whole story, and there were nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field, and the result would be the boredom which inevitably arises when everything is laid out cut and dried before us.... Reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative. (p. 51)

There are then, says Iser, “elements of indeterminacy” or “gaps” left in literary texts (also referred to as silences) which incidentally, he says, give a story its “dynamism”; it is these “gaps” that stimulate the reader’s imagination and through such strategies as predicting outcomes, the reader constructs an individualised meaning,¹⁸ which otherwise would have no existence:

¹⁷ Phenomenology, according to Terry Eagleton (1996) “established the centrality of the human subject” (p. 50).

¹⁸ In such thinking, it is easy to see how the word *meaning* slowly takes on the connotations and denotations of the word *interpretation*.

... one text is potentially capable of several different realisations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way, thereby excluding the various other possibilities; as he reads, he will make his own decision as to how the gap is to be filled.
(p. 55)

In an English class where students *are* familiar with the processes of not only filling the gaps but also sharing their views via reflective journal writing and reviewing faulty predictions, the atmosphere can be dynamic though the mindful teacher must also guide these indeterminacies and differing interpretations towards coherence which, it must be stressed, is not the same as a single and fixed meaning of the text.

Louise Rosenblatt (1994), perhaps the most often referred to of all reader-response theorists, first published her transactional theory of reading as early as 1938, but not until the 1960s were her ideas adopted. Rosenblatt coined the word *transaction* from John Dewey who, like Rosenblatt, wished to establish “the knower, the knowing, and the known ... as aspects of one process” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1058). Rosenblatt dismissed any notions of a so-called “generic reader” and saw instead each individual reading act as an event that involved both the mind and emotions of the reader transacting with “a particular pattern of signs, a text, and occurring at a particular time in a particular context” (p. 1063). Further, she adds, “the ‘meaning’ does not reside ready-made ‘in’ the text or ‘in’ the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text” (p. 1063).

Ray Misson points out that Rosenblatt’s view of the function of the text is in fact twofold, acting both “as a stimulus and as a control” (p. 37). It stimulates what Rosenblatt (1994) calls the reader’s “linguistic experiential reservoir” which she says, “reflects the reader’s cultural, social and personal history” (p. 1064), and it controls the creation of meaning as she explains in the following:

If the marks on the page evoke elements that cannot be assimilated into the emerging synthesis, the guiding principle or framework is revised; if necessary, it is discarded and a complete rereading occurs.... Reader and text

are involved in a complex, nonlinear, recursive, self-correcting transaction.
(p. 1064)

What is eventually created or shaped through this transaction is the evoked work or what Rosenblatt calls “the poem”.

There is a further variable in this transaction however, one which will ultimately determine the final shape of “the poem”, and which consequently has huge implications for classroom practice. This is what Rosenblatt calls the reader’s “stance” which is a reflection of the reader’s purpose for reading a text. Rosenblatt perceives two basic stances, the *efferent* and the *aesthetic* which, moreover, she sees as a continuum (in rejection of the traditional, structuralist binary which was open to judgments of *good* versus *bad*; *right* versus *wrong*). The *efferent* stance is one in which the reader consciously extracts and retains certain information, what Rosenblatt (1994) calls the “scientific” way of looking at the world; the *aesthetic* stance on the other hand is the “artistic” way of looking at the world and involves “perception through the senses, feelings and intuitions” (p. 1067). To elaborate and further clarify Rosenblatt adds: “The efferent stance pays more attention to the cognitive, the referential, the factual, the analytic, the logical, the quantitative aspects of meaning. And the aesthetic stance pays more attention to the sensuous, the affective, the emotive, the qualitative” (p. 1068).

Rosenblatt makes the observation that although no two readings will be identical, one reader can share through paraphrase an efferent reading that will satisfy another’s efferent purpose but because of its very subjectivity an aesthetic reading remains unique to the reader.

The third strategy Ray Misson posits as a means of bringing stability to the reader-response process adds a critical element and is “to see reading practices as somehow constrained, even though the text itself is not” (p 37). He refers to the work of reader-response theorist Stanley Fish who “argues that there is no determinacy in the text, but there are agreed strategies for making meaning out of the text, stemming from the ‘interpretive community’ of which the reader is a part” (p. 38).

The meaning one creates then will be “due to neither the reader nor the text” (Beach, 1993, p. 106), but to the shared conventions and discourses of the particular interpretative community of which one claims membership at the time of reading. I say at the time of reading because Fish himself states that “interpretative communities grow and decline, and individuals move from one to another ... interpretative communities are no more stable than texts because interpretative strategies are not natural or universal, but *learned*” (pp. 182-183 italics added).

Fish’s theory has been the subject of much criticism. For example, Richard Beach (1993) points out that because it is possible to learn and make opposing readings of any one text, it becomes “difficult for readers to clearly distinguish between allegiances to different interpretative communities” (p. 107). When one considers the diverse range of possible communities, which for example in the case of an adolescent student might consist of same sex peer group, family, neighbourhood community, and classroom, the point Beach makes may well be so. Still, this is not necessarily to be viewed negatively but can become a useful teaching point leading as it does to the poststructuralist view of the constructedness of the “actual” reader referred to earlier. This is the kind of critical thinking that encourages students to examine where their ideas and interpretative strategies are coming from. Besides, I agree with Ray Misson who claims that

Fish develops a proposition that what we are doing when we try to convince someone else to our reading of a text is not demonstrating that our reading fits the text better – since the text is radically indeterminate we can’t ever say that – but rather we are trying to persuade her/him to read the text as we have read it, indeed to create the text as we have created it. (p. 38)

Being aware of the existence of influences on reading is what is pertinent here and so once a religious reading has been explored with a senior class studying, say, Patricia Grace’s novel *Potiki*, the class can then set about exploring a feminist reading of the same novel or can adopt any other political stance and, in so doing, learn about the power behind language to construct apparent realities. This leads

to the following section which takes a more detailed look at the scope of reader-response theories and also examines further constraints on the reader besides those already indicated by Fish's "interpretive community".

4.2.1 Reader-response criticism. From formalism to post-structuralism

As Ray Misson points out, the title of Jane Tompkins' anthology, borrowed here as my sub-heading indicates the wide scope of reader-response criticism covering

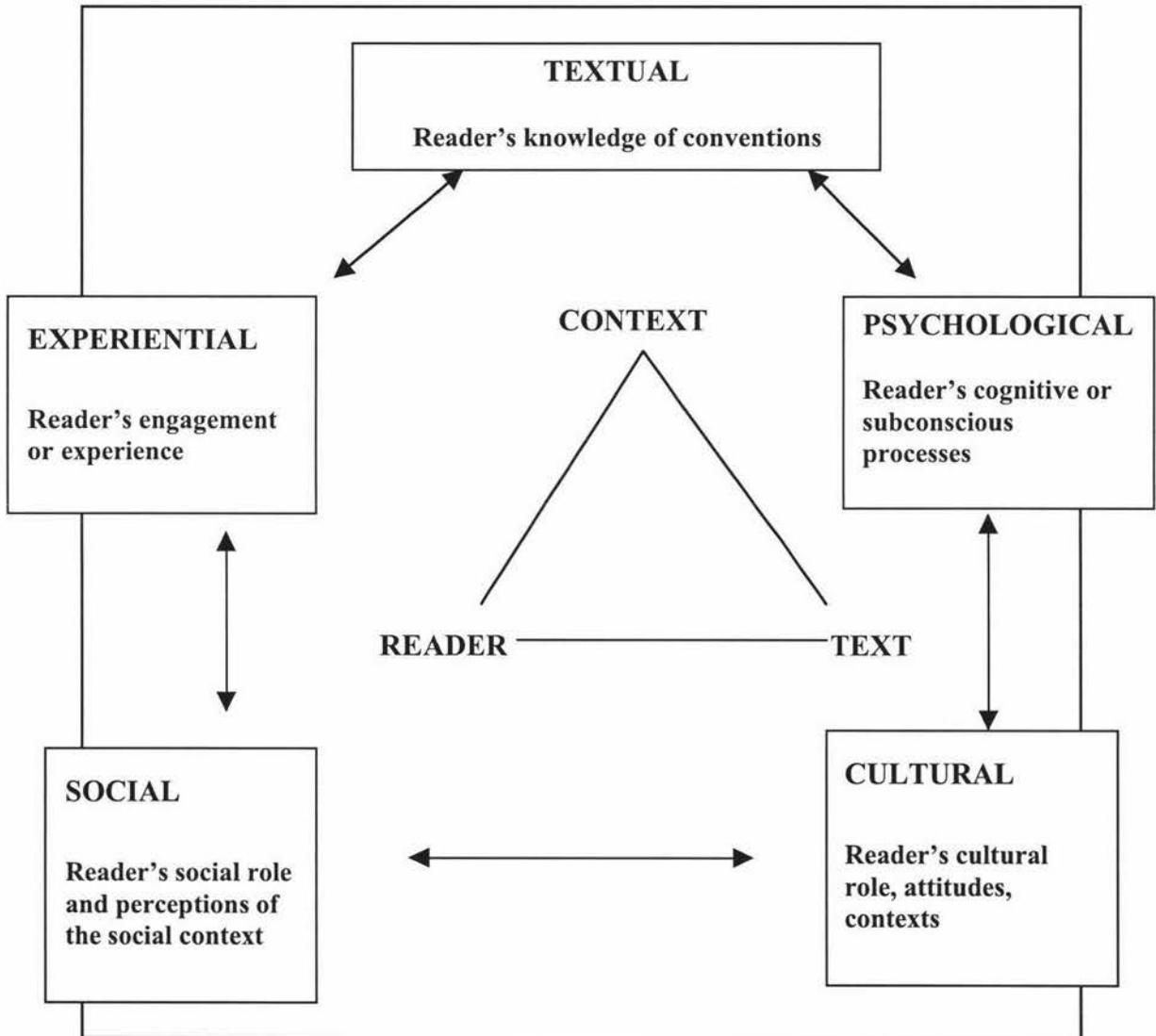


Figure 1: Five perspectives on the reader/text/context transaction. (From Beach, 1993, p.8)

almost a century of developing and interweaving ideas. Beach (1993), in his excellent book *A teacher's introduction to reader-response theories*, outlines five theoretical perspectives on reader response, each representing “different lenses that illuminate particular aspects of the reader/text/context transaction” (p. 8). Figure 1, taken from Beach, offers a visual summary of the most salient points Beach makes, although only the rudiments of each perspective are covered. The arrows have been added to indicate that these perspectives do overlap and intersect. Beach explains that each of the five perspectives, “illuminates only a particular facet of the reader/text transaction” (p. 9). However, he points out that it is possible to conceptualise these five perspectives as

moving from the specific to the global, from the textual and experiential theorists' focus on the immediate text/reader transaction to the psychologist's concern with cognitive and subconscious forces shaping the reader's transaction to the social and cultural theorist's interest in how social and cultural phenomena shape meaning. (p 9)

The strengths of each of the perspectives, together with reference to some of their limitations are examined in the following sections.

4.2.2 Textual Theories

Textual theories focus on the reader's knowledge of literary conventions, and are inseparable, as stated earlier, from the influence of structuralism. David Lodge (1988) referring to the influence of Saussure makes the following interesting point regarding the earliest developments in literary criticism: “that the idea that literary texts could be seen as manifestations of a literary system [such as narrative] the underlying rules of which might be understood, [made] literary criticism a more ‘scientific’ discipline” (p. 2). Thus, the way was paved for New Criticism and, not surprisingly, the earliest emphasis for reader-response theorists, specifically textual theorists, was placed on the text and the reader's prior knowledge of the conventions of narrative and genre theory – *text as artefact* in other words.

Knowledge of the conventions of narrative and genre are essential aspects of teaching with literature particularly in mainstream classes, though *how* these are taught and with what emphasis relative to the roles of the active reader and the context are the focus of attack for critics of textual theory.¹⁹ Textual theorists tended to believe that the way through to meaning lay in understanding text conventions, because, as Beach (1993) explains “text conventions were seen as ‘constitutive’ rather than ‘regulative’ i.e. they constitute rather than regulate a form or genre. As with the rules of baseball, without the conventions, there would be no form or genre” (p. 17). It is easy to see in this why it is that the early reader-response theorists gave such large focus to the text, which in turn meant that a reader’s subjective response could only ever be a token strategy for engaging students with a text for which there was already a pre-determined meaning.

Despite limitations, textual theories have made a contribution to response theories that is, moreover, clearly evident in current teaching practice. For example, among the approaches to text structure that developed was *intertextuality*, that is, the application of a reader’s prior knowledge of other related texts to the current text.²⁰ A further strategy highly valued by textual theorists for guiding readers through the reading of a text is Wolfgang Iser’s theory of indeterminacy which I have already examined, albeit briefly. Gradually however, as theories developed, the emphasis on the text gave way to emphasis on the reader.

¹⁹ Beach (1993) cites Steven Mailloux who charged “on the one hand, that some reader-response critics who privilege the influence of the text on reader’s responses are no more than New Critics in disguise, assuming that at bottom, the text determines (or ought to determine) everything else” (p. 2).

²⁰ For information about *intertextuality* see J. Kristeva (1989) and T. Moi (1986).

4.2.3 *Experiential Theories*

As with the development of personal-response, traced in the previous chapter, reader-response criticism grew in part in reaction to the strict formalism of the New Critics, challenging in particular the *affective fallacy* (see 4.1). However,

experiential theories of response, which value the processes of a reader's engagement with text via personal experience and of which Rosenblatt is the best known exponent, "did not have a strong pedagogical impact until the sixties" (Beach, 1993, p. 49), by which time both textual and experiential theorists were being influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the growing interest in psychoanalytical perspectives through the work of psychologists such as D.W. Harding. There are a number of reasons for the earlier lack of impact, not least being, as Beach explains in Rosenblatt's case, "that as a woman perceived to be dealing primarily with feelings, she was not given the credibility in the literary critical establishment that even male response theorists were afforded" (p. 50). Rosenblatt is not just concerned with feelings however. Beach points out that "in advocating a focus on the experience itself, she is including a range of response strategies, including those traditionally labelled cognitive" (p. 50). The reader's stance, as discussed earlier is one of these. As far as the subjective aspects of experiential theories go, however, teachers today have inherited a hugely significant legacy (which needless to say not all avail themselves of), involving students in such response processes as engaging, identifying, empathising, imaging, evaluating and reflecting, all based on the combination of the student's biographical experience and what becomes her/his *lived through* experience with the text.

One of the limitations of experiential theories is that not all students are prepared to engage with texts on a personal basis, choosing in some instances to repress

painful memories that may take a lifetime to come to terms with.²¹ This could lead to an imbalance in the sharing of ideas and a further difficulty may then arise in that the more vocal members of a class may determine a generalised experience for everybody, and thus a meaning not all will be happy to accept but nevertheless, unempowered to argue against. The converse of students' reluctance to engage on a personal level is the risk of solipsism and the difficulty this creates for students of then looking at a text objectively for transactional writing. Despite these limitations and others which Beach (1993, pp. 68-70) analyses closely, experiential theories have helped to remind teachers to value students as individuals.

4.2.4 Psychological Theories

Interest in the psychoanalytical perspective and its attendant cognitive psychology brought an increased focus on the reader, in particular the subconscious processes that affect the creation of an interpretation. Beach explains that these “processes vary according to both unique individual personality and developmental level” (p. 8) and that such theories “are useful to teachers because they provide descriptive frameworks for explaining students' responses” (p. 71). To my knowledge, Piaget's stages of cognitive development are still standard college of education teacher-trainee fare.

In his paper in which he traces the influences on reader-response research in the seventies and eighties, James Squire (1994) notes that two major developments have shaped research. First there was the 1966 Anglo-American Dartmouth seminar where reader-response theorists “insisted that the proper concern of teachers is response to literature – not the literature itself” (p. 639) and

second, the shift in reading research from concern with development of basic competence in reading to concern with cognitive processes involved in

²¹ This is probably more of a problem in the personal writing lesson than teaching with literature which can accommodate the student's silence.

reading comprehension [which] led to recognition of the importance of personal schemata and of reader's prior knowledge in shaping comprehension (that is, response), even of expository prose. (p. 639)

Readers draw on their personal schemata or schema when they employ such strategies as prediction and inference, schema defined by Beach (1993) as "those cognitive organisers, scripts or scenarios that help guide readers' attention to certain aspects or features of texts" (p. 87). Such strategies, needless to say, are immensely valuable to teaching with literature. The question of schema theory is too complex to go into here but it is worth acknowledging, as Beach does, that

despite its seeming usefulness, as is the case with much reading comprehension research, most schema theorists remain tied to an assumption that the meaning is 'in' the text and is distinct from the reader, who must learn to apply the appropriate schema. (p. 90)

A further limitation of the psychoanalytical perspective, namely "that it fails to account for variations in social or cultural contexts" (Beach, 1993, p. 100), leads to discussion of the final two poststructuralist perspectives which continue to focus on the reader but more globally through, specifically, an examination of the constraints that are imposed on the reader by context.

4.2.5 Social Theories

Social theories of response were particularly indebted to the work of Thomas Kuhn and the advent of the social constructivist theory of knowledge which as Beach (1993) states "challenges the idea of knowledge as a set of external, verifiable truths" (p. 105), and proposes as Kuhn does "ways of knowing and testing reality ... relative to different paradigms – the legal, religious, economic, psychological, as well as the empirical/scientific" (p. 105). So, as with knowledge, meanings in literary texts can only be determined within their specific social contexts. The *interpretive community* of Stanley Fish, discussed earlier, also embodies this belief. It's interesting to comment here from my own teaching observations that some students, particularly those around the age of thirteen to

fifteen, are so strongly aligned with their social peer group that they will make a point of agreeing or disagreeing with the responses of their classmates according to the friendship patterns and power hierarchies established. This behaviour is further borne out in a recent paper of Beach's (1998) in which he cites a study of two groups of adolescent females carried out by M. Finders who found that "group members solidified their allegiance to their own group by deliberately responding in ways opposed to social practices of members of the other group" (p. 179).

To an experienced teacher, the descriptors Finders uses to define the two groups, namely the "social queens" and the "tough cookies", say it all. Teachers too will often have strongly realised personal convictions arising from alignment with particular interpretive communities lending them to persist in presenting one view at the expense of others. However, those influenced by poststructuralism will temper their personal views and encourage the kind of critical reflection that has started to put its stamp on thinking if not practice in the 1990s.

In talking about the classroom as a social community, Beach (1993) makes the point that "responses in the classroom also reflect larger cultural attitudes and values" (p. 124). There is considerable overlap between social and cultural response theories. Both, for example, acknowledge that because language is unstable, meaning is indeterminable, thereby challenging the structuralist's one-to-one correspondence between word and meaning. One only has to think about the changes in meaning in the last twenty to thirty years of words such as *ultimate*, *nice*, *grass*, and *gay* or the word *joint* to use Beach's example, to appreciate this point. Not just the meaning given but also attitudes towards meaning will be determined then by the wider social/cultural context; what poststructuralists examine, says Beach (1993), are

the ways in which schools, businesses, organized religions, or governments limit the signifieds of the signifier to meanings consistent with their own institutional ideology ... and how these institutions socialise readers to respond according to certain 'subject positions' consistent with these ideological stances. (p. 126)

The major limitation underlying social theories then, is the susceptibility of each community to control and manipulation for its own end. Beach (1993) reminds us here of strategies employed by organisers of sports events or rock concerts that, operating “in invisible ways, shape the meaning of the event ... not only to control but to create certain behaviours” (p. 123). Advertisers are experts in this field.

4.2.6 Cultural Theories

Reading/subject positions are of central concern to cultural theories and are derived from the work of French sociologist and critical theorist Michel Foucault who redefined the word *discourse* to refer to discursive practices which according to Beach (1993) “constitute relationships among persons according to the power, status and rights inherent in institutions ... and which exist prior to individual’s own experiences” (p. 127). This marks the parting of the way with those earlier response theorists who believed that a reader’s subjective input or subject position was unconstrained. Mellor, Patterson and O’Neill (1991) express the idea clearly when they state that “texts are read and gaps filled by readers, not with ideas that they personally ‘make up’, but with meanings that are already available in their culture” (p. 21). The number of differing ideas readers have access to will determine the subject positions they are capable of adopting. In New Zealand, as in much of the western world, dominant subject positions have been those created by white, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class males. However, we only have to examine the advances and impact made by feminist theory alone to appreciate the potential power behind so-called resistant readings, that is readings which resist that propounded by the dominant culture. Needless to say, gender equity is not the only issue at stake. Cultural theories also draw attention to subject positions which examine race/ethnicity and class.

Beach (1993) mentions a few limitations to cultural theories, their deterministic stance for one and, significantly for teachers, whether or not students will be “open to questioning social and cultural norms outside the school” (p. 151). Teachers will be trapped inside a vicious circle he says

if students, given the forces of poverty, broken families, drug and alcohol use, unemployment, a widening gap between the rich and the poor, a consumeristic culture, etc. lack the capacity or ability to question these very forces. (p.151)

This however is the most gloomy scenario, one which we need to be alerted to but which need not dominate thinking. Cultural theories, together with aspects from the other response theories discussed, offer viable ways to teaching with literature and developing critical literacy, and the earlier they are introduced into schooling, the better for both individuals and society as a whole.

4.3 What does this mean for teachers?

Even though we can see there have been many contributors and many different contributions made towards reader-response theories, these aspects discussed in the foregoing all have a role to play in reader-response approaches. The solution for teachers lies in an eclectic and informed approach, one which recognises that personal-response has a vital role to play in a reader-response approach; one which, focusing on a humanitarian approach, not only engages the reader imaginatively but also emphasises cognitive development and critical evaluation. In a *text as discourse* approach to literature, the way to do this is to engage students in such metacognitive activities as asking critical questions about where their ideas, together with those of authors, have come from. It is only when a student begins to develop this kind of objectivity, Rosenblatt's efferent stance, that in conjunction with the aesthetic stance the development of critical faculties needed for critical literacy becomes possible.

The extent to which these ideas are already current in the thinking of educators employed largely in tertiary education (e.g. teacher training) in New Zealand, is examined in the following chapter which consists of a selective review of the past ten years of the NZATE's professional publication *English in Aotearoa*.

Chapter Five

ENGLISH IN AOTEAROA

5.1 Introduction

After reviewing ten years of *English in Aotearoa* publications from 1987 to assess the status quo reflected in these of both teaching with literature and literary theory, there was found to be a paucity of relevant articles, a preponderance of articles related to the development of writing),²² and many articles covering a range of concerns to English teachers, more recently relating to the new English Curriculum. What articles and transcripts of conference addresses do occur, however, are highly significant in that they reflect many of the theoretical positions examined in chapter 4 (see 4.2.1-6). Further, in 1996, *English in Aotearoa* adopted a new format, with special focus on specific areas of English, and the *critical literacy* focus of the May 1997 publication contained several articles sufficient to allay any fears that, theoretically at least, literature in the classroom was a forgotten area.

During the opening address given at the NZATE Conference May 1989, Gerald Grace (1989) emphasised the changed role of the English teacher and how, as “front line defenders of concepts of a liberal education”, English teachers have a responsibility to “be vigilant against any attempt to deny to their students ... an engagement with a comprehensive range of literary and cultural resources and an engagement with *critical thinking* about those responses” (p. 3, italics added). In the early nineties these ideas began to emerge in the literature, and to find their way into draft curriculum documents.

5.2 Literacy as a way of thinking

Emerging in the thinking of several writers is the idea of literacy as a way of thinking, thus the seeds of *critical literacy* are sown. The influence of work done by Australian, Allan Luke, on the learning and teaching of reading, can be observed in several articles, though each writer retains her/his own emphasis and unique approach to the issue. The first under discussion is Rod McGregor's stimulating article, *Working with Literature: Theory into Practice* (1992), where reference is made to Luke's four stages in proficient reading: "Coding competence, (how do I crack this?); semantic competence, (what does this mean?); pragmatic competence, (what do I do with this here and now?); and critical competence, (what is this text trying to do to me?)", (p. 63).²³ McGregor, relating these to the New Zealand teaching context asks the rhetorical yet key question, "Are we not stuck, endlessly, on the semantic level?" In our preoccupation with meaning, in a kind of gospel-according-to-text approach to literature, we are overlooking not only the active role of readers in constructing her/his own meanings (readings) but also as McGregor points out, the critical question, "what is this text trying to do to me?" (p. 63).

This is a densely packed article, resorting to note form as a way of including many of the excellent concepts derived from reader-response theories. These notes are worthy of close study and the teaching suggestions which follow offer enticing ways of indeed putting theory into practice

Noeline Wright's paper *What has literature got to do with literacy?* (1992), draws on Elspeth Stuckey's book, *The violence of literacy* (1991). Wright discusses concepts of literacy, in particular Stuckey's Freirean view that "Literacy itself can

²² This is a reflection no doubt, of the professional development engendered by the \$90,000 approved by the Minister of Education, C. R. Marshall, July, 1987 for the New Zealand writing project.

²³ This work was developed by Freebody and Luke (1990).

be understood only in its social and political context, and that context ... can be seen as one of entrenched class structure” (p. 10). Stuckey further notes that literacy’s current high profile “is symptomatic of a speedy, ruthless transition from an industrial to an information-based economy” (p. 10). So, where does literature fit into this? The link Wright makes with literature may at first appear tenuous, but focusing as she does on a definition of literacy within the broader contexts of *knowledge* and *culture*, Wright paves the way to a concept of literacy which goes beyond the mere skills of being able to read and write as required by an information-based economy, to one which “encompasses an awareness of where and who a person is in relation to literature” which she says “holds up models of identity, culture, behaviour and society for scrutiny”²⁴ (p. 11). The link here with Luke and McGregor is clear: teachers need to go beyond the semantic level of competency to explore the kind of critical competency which encourages students to question the intention of texts.

In his NZATE conference address entitled *The development of English: The next stage?* John Dixon (1996), consistent with his interest in teaching models, makes a plea for “a critical extension to (our) current communication model, which will seriously affect English teaching” (p. 19). As it stands, he says, this is a one-way model amounting to little more than the transmission of knowledge from the all-knowing teacher to her passive and variably attentive student audience who, in turn, will reproduce the knowledge when and as required. What is needed is an interactive or dialogue model which Dixon sees as “essential in education” as indeed it is in other spheres of life where “key decisions” will be “vitally affected by the quality of ... exchanges” (p. 21). Dixon further points out limitations to what he sees as the current communication model and, by extension, “*The Framework* when it comes to listening, reading and viewing” (p. 21). This model provides the major general categories, of purpose, audience and situation, which

²⁴ Incidentally, *Scrutiny* was the title F. R. Leavis gave to his critical journal first published in 1935, my point being that *what* is being scrutinised is where the shift in focus lies. Perhaps it is the act of *scrutiny* that imposes Britton’s discipline (see 3.1).

typify for writers/speakers what it is they are producing, but fail to indicate for readers/listeners what their role might be. Furthermore, he says, these same categories do not allow for “appraising or weighing the value of what we’re [writers/speakers] doing” (p. 22).

Using reading and four lines of poetry from Robert Frost as a concrete example, Dixon illustrates how an interactive model transforms the passive listener/reader into an active participant who “calls up” signs, reflective of her/his own “feelings, ... emotions and attitudes” (p. 23). In a communicative model focusing solely on “incoming signs or structures, ... the controlling process, the intelligent imagining” (pp. 22-23), is left out. The reason we need to be so active, Dixon stresses, is that texts leave gaps; in fact he claims “all the language we produce leaves things to be understood, writing especially – whether transactional or poetic, in the office or in a poetry reading” (p. 23). But filling the gaps is not enough. Once we have arrived at our meanings we switch to what Dixon calls a “responsive role” and pursue the question: “What do I make of that experience I’ve been through?” (p. 24). Again there are echoes here of Luke as expressed in what McGregor was saying earlier about students needing to make the transition from semantic to critical competence.

May, 1997 saw *English in Aotearoa* produce its first publication with critical literacy as the major focus. Among several articles of interest was Gail Cawkwell’s *Realising literacy practices* (1997) in which she raises for consideration, the relationship that exists “between the literate practices in primary classrooms and the literate practices that exist and are being constructed in the wider world” (p. 54). Cawkwell reminded of a quote from Allan Luke, reiterates his questions: “Who gets what kind of competence from our teaching? To what ends? What kinds of literate subjects does our pedagogy produce? Fitted to what kind of society?” (Cawkwell, 1997, p. 54). Examining curriculum documents and syllabi from as far back as 1960, Cawkwell suggests that “at the moment ... there has developed an uncritical, domesticating, culturally specific and gendered competence” (p. 55), although she adds that “the new English in the New Zealand

Curriculum document moves us along from this, but what it means in practice is presently being worked out” (p. 55).

Cawkwell, adopting all four of Luke’s competencies as McGregor does, examines ways of working in “any programme of instruction in literacy, whether it be at kindergarten, or in adult ESL classes ...” (p. 56). In support of developing critical competence that is, “learning your role as text analyst and asking: How is this text manipulating me?” (p. 56), Cawkwell traces several versions of Little Red Riding Hood, each with quite a different protagonist suited to the times and audience she was written for, as a way of illustrating the extent to which “texts are crafted objects, written by persons with particular dispositions or orientations to the information” (p. 57). Needless to say, Red Riding Hood goes through such transformations as the shrewd, and courageous peasant girl of the earliest oral version, to the “pretty, spoiled, gullible and helpless child” (p. 57) of Perrault. Using Joy Cowley’s story, *Our Teacher Miss Pool*, Cawkwell then gives a breakdown of the sort of open-ended questions a teacher could use to develop critical reading competence in young pupils.

The final paper in this section is Wendy Morgan’s *Clothes wear out, learning doesn’t: Realising past and future in today’s critical literacy curriculum* (1997). Writing from a poststructuralist perspective, Morgan explores the role *discourses* play in the formation of selves. Citing Foucault’s definition of discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (p. 13), and drawing on the autobiographical writings of Pearl Daniels, combined with reflections based on personal knowledge of this woman, Morgan shows how “not only our social identities but also our sense of self ... are formed ... according to ready-made discourses” (p. 13). Morgan’s paper takes us into the very heart of critical literacy, and throws light on future developments but in so doing goes beyond the boundaries of this study.

5.3 Other related issues

Some of the articles and writers already referred to covered further issues related to reading and teaching with literature, as do others not yet mentioned. McGregor (1991, pp. 55-60) voices secondary teachers' perennial and increasing concern over the lack of reading done by students and suggests that teachers are responsible for this in that there is insufficient focus on reading *process* thus echoing the emphasis given in the language and personal-growth model developed in the late 60s (see chapter 3.1). In focusing instead on the production by students of cogent interpretations for examination purposes, teachers have overlooked the role of the reader – her/his reading process, her/his interpretation. Expedience on the part of teachers may well be a factor here. One deduces from this article that in encouraging the reader's *active* role in constructing meaning, and moving away from a class set approach, teachers will encourage a passion for reading. There must be a close link between the lack of reading and how it is taught; undoubtedly the use teachers make currently of personal-response goes part way at least to engaging students on an emotional level, even though this personal-response may not produce the kind of "acceptable reading" which McGregor reminds us is "limited to interpretation of a certain type" (p. 57). McGregor lists nine "action strategies" for bringing about change in senior literature classrooms which he says "might improve the odds on your pupils becoming lifelong readers" (p. 59).

Another writer who stresses the importance of the *process* of reading is Terry Locke in his paper *In the guise of nature: Meeting ideology with a wink and a nod*. (1993, pp. 35-41). Locke believes, moreover, that it is incumbent upon teachers to "become familiar with what is happening to the theoretical basis to their subject" (p. 35). To assist teachers, he includes examples for "Questioning the Short Story" and refers to the excellent Chalkface Press publications which, he points out, "are well formatted and contain stimulating textual examples [And] are unique in Australasia as an attempt to translate Poststructuralist literary theory into actual

classroom practice” (p. 35).²⁵ Altogether this paper is a useful summary of the main ideas underlying the transition from New Criticism to a poststructuralist position and offers practical help to teachers in the samples of questioning strategies included.

The final paper of interest is Geoff Sheehan’s challenging and searching *The Abolition of man and the 1996 NZATE conference* (1996). Here Sheehan, wishing to substantiate the concept, critical thinking, argues “that consideration should be given to the viewpoint that there are objectively valid and moral aesthetic values” (p. 51), and that literary texts provide an opportunity to explore and debate such values. It is only in the acknowledgment of such an objective set of values that we are able, he says, to make such judgements as “This is a good book but I don’t like it” (p. 52). Without engaging in the philosophical debate this paper invites, as to whether literary merit is determined by the inclusion or absence of universally acknowledged aesthetic values, the reader is nevertheless prompted to consider recent developments in literary theory and the “practical consequences (of these) for the teaching of English” (p. 52). Sheehan reminds us of the current transition from the focus on text of the New Critics, who, he points out “shaped the critical perceptions of many teachers currently teaching English” (p. 52), to the focus on what he calls “the most influential literary theory of recent times: the personal-response theory, which places the greatest emphasis on creating ways ... for the student to respond to the text” (p. 52).²⁶ From focus on the reader, more recently has come a new emphasis with the poststructuralists whose focus switched to language itself and the constructedness of both text and the reader, who, as Sheehan says, “constructs a new reading each time the text is read” (p. 52). Sheehan finishes his paper by making a plea for the consideration of “a bedrock of

²⁵ More recently in New Zealand, teaching resource books that have translated poststructuralist theories into classroom practice are those written by R. Davey and E. Rathgen (1994, & 1995).

²⁶ Sheehan confirmed that he used the terms personal-response and reader-response interchangeably (personal communication, 20th June, 1998).

values ... includ[ing] justice, mercy, love and concern ... as a necessary part of the critical mix” (p. 53). These he says, together with personal-response and John Dixon’s “productive interpretation, an analysis of reading which relies equally on textual clues and on the reader’s imagination” are what will “enact meaning” (p. 53). Anything less than this reduces literary criticism to “mere description” (p. 53).

In a further article by Sheehan, *The Abolition of Man: literature and ethics* (1997), Sheehan provides, firstly, a useful chart summarising certain key aspects of literary theories of the last one hundred years. This enables teachers to see at a glance not only how the focus has shifted from author to text, to reader, to language but also the range of approaches that are available and from which Sheehan says “effective literature teaching can profitably draw ... something no doubt that many teachers already do” (p. 25). Building on his earlier paper, Sheehan then moves to his second and more pressing concern, namely a philosophical basis for teaching literature, in particular “the issue of ethical values which [he feels] is not highlighted enough in recent literary theory, nor in the recent English curriculum document” (p. 25). Sheehan provides the interested teacher with a succinct summary of three ethical theories (including those of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill) and an exercise drawn from Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* to involve students in moral decision-making, a process he sees to reiterate, as “an essential component of thinking critically” (p. 27).

5.4 Summary

The papers reviewed all reflect a concern with the need for teachers to move away from mere functional competence towards critical literacy, through more focus on the student as an *active reader*, one who is alerted to the fact that no text should be read without scrutiny. The overtones in many of the papers are unashamedly political. Several of the writers offer practical assistance referring in particular to Luke’s critical competence and setting out samples of questioning strategies that could be used, while Dixon in particular highlights shortcomings already apparent in the Curriculum in that there is insufficient scope for “intelligent imagining”. Cawkwell, echoing Dixon’s concern, warns against “domesticating competence”

and “manipulation” and Morgan introduces the concept of *discourses* and how these function to shape the mostly unwary. Finally, Sheehan, adding substance to the nebulous term *critical thinking* makes a case for moral reasoning and ethical values, concerns too readily relegated to the back benches.

The status quo regarding *English in Aotearoa* publications clearly reflects and promotes the central concerns of reader-response theories, in particular those shaped by poststructuralist thinking. This study continues in the following two chapters, to present the methodology and the results of the research undertaken which examines what teachers say they are actually doing in the classroom.

Chapter Six

METHODOLOGY

6.1 Introduction

This study sought to ascertain the status quo regarding practices underlying teaching with literature in the two contexts of mainstream secondary English classrooms and a range of ESOL classrooms, and to determine what constraints operate in this subject area that could have a bearing on the development of critical literacy; to do this an approach was used that would enable the analysis of teachers' stated practices, preferences and constraints. The value of effective professional development (the lack of which is perceived as a major constraint to the development of critical literacy) was examined through carefully framed questions, while it was expected that constraints more closely associated with actual teaching practice (e.g. examinations) would emerge without prompting. The three major research questions (derived from the thesis statements in chapter 1) are:

1. To what extent are teachers familiar with and employ a reader-response approach?
2. What constraints operate in both mainstream and ESOL English classrooms that may prevent the development of critical literacy?
3. Are these constraints different in each context?

Literature was chosen as the area of study in which to explore these research questions for several reasons. Firstly, because in focusing on literature, links between the influence of literary theories on teaching practice are readily discernible and secondly, literature is more amenable to the development of

critical literacy than any other area of the English curriculum. A third reason lies in the perceived need to promote the use of literature in the ESOL classroom.

In order to examine the above questions more closely, the current status of teaching with literature was explored through the following secondary questions, each of which is nested in the major research questions as indicated. The study which follows seeks to find out the current status of teaching with literature in both contexts and asks, firstly, the following (secondary) questions, derived from the initial thesis statements and, secondly, general questions pertinent to the ESOL context alone.

6.1.1 Mainstream context

- 1.1 Do teachers make a distinction between personal and reader-response?
- 1.2 How is personal-response used in a teaching with literature context?
- 2.1 Is there any noticeable difference between the approaches teachers adopt with juniors and seniors; L1 and mainstreamed L2?
- 2.2 Do mainstreamed ESOL students pose problems for regular English teachers?
- 2.3 Are examination requirements a factor in determining choices teachers make in respect to question 2.1?

6.1.2 ESOL context

The following questions are general as they come from a different perspective than those secondary questions above, pertaining as they do only to the ESOL context:

1. To what extent do teachers teach with literature in the language classroom?
2. What is the major focus for those teachers who do teach with literature?

This chapter describes the research method undertaken in answering these questions by focusing specifically on the participants and the procedure.

6.2 Approach to the research

6.2.1 Preliminary trials

Initially, a set of research questions existed which related more closely to a comparison between personal-response and reader-response theories. To pursue these, experimental research using an interventionist methodology was trialled, with a view to collecting data to examine whether or not a reader-response approach to teaching with literature with ESOL students elicited more “meaningful and revealing discourse” than a text-bound personal-response approach as claimed by Hirvela (1996, p. 132). However, after carrying out a series of three lessons with a class of 11 ESOL adolescent female students, whose language proficiency levels ranged from elementary to advanced intermediate, this study was abandoned. Although the methodology allowed for control over known variables, including the range in language proficiency levels, there was one important factor missing in the classroom environment, namely an established interpersonal relationship between teacher and students, built up over a period of time and based on trust. In the absence of this rapport, the students were understandably hesitant, uncertain about not only the new teacher in front of them but also the sudden switch to new approaches and changes in their routines. The exercise was not a total waste, but significant in that it highlighted the need for close teacher/student interaction (see 3.1), which is essential to a response approach to literature and the goal of critical literacy. Training the teacher with whom the students were relaxed and familiar in certain questioning strategies may have been a better option in hindsight.

Because this experimental research had to be abandoned, the decision was made to considerably broaden the originally planned survey of NZATE teachers to include a survey of ESOL teachers, with a view to *examining* and *comparing* the constraints existing in each teaching context.

6.3 Research design

This research was undertaken through two surveys utilising questionnaires in each instance as the sole instrument for the collection of data. The first conducted was with a population of regular²⁷ secondary school teachers of mainstream English, and the second, a population of ESOL teachers from a range of learning institutions. Both surveys were conducted through professional associations as these provided convenient access to what Donna Johnson (1992) refers to as *sampling frames* or lists “of the set of people (or entities) in the population who actually have a chance of being selected” (p. 112). Because of this *convenience* factor, as Johnson points out, and because in both surveys there was a *voluntary* element in that the goodwill and cooperation of recipients of the questionnaires was depended upon, the samples could be described as *nonprobability samples*. If this is the case then, what this suggests in Johnson’s words is that

the sample group may differ in systematic and important ways from the population of interest, [therefore] we could not ‘statistically infer’ that the findings for the sample are similar to the findings for the population. We could, however, make judgments about how the results might generalise to the population. (p. 112)

One way the sample groups may differ from the populations “in important ways” lies in the assumption that members of a professional association are more likely to be predisposed to cooperating in a survey related to professional matters than their non-member counterparts, the implication being that such members are better informed than non-members about state of the art pedagogies, in this case the implementation of literary theory in teaching practice. If this factor did operate, then the samples may be subject to weighting in certain areas which means this

²⁷ The term *regular* refers to teachers of mainstream or academic classes as opposed to those teachers who work with ESOL classes.

study can seek to do little more than generalise and describe certain constraints in the populations as a whole.

Having said this, however, it is important to point out as Johnson also does that because there was a large element of random selection involved in the sampling procedures (ensuring that elements such as length of time teaching, age, gender and exposure to response theories through professional development, had the same chance of being selected), each sample could also be considered *representative* of the populations from which they were drawn. There was little indication that the sample group in each instance did differ significantly from the populations of interest which means that it was possible to draw conclusions for the larger entities, which was the aim of this study (p. 112).

In each of the surveys there was close to a 20% response rate which meant that although small, the samples were not insignificant and could be considered acceptable subsets of the teaching populations they represented. In regard to survey sample size, David Nunan (1992) refers to the work of F. Fowler (1988) who argued that “a sample of 150 people will describe a population of 15,000 or 15 million with virtually the same degree of accuracy, assuming all other aspects of the sample design and sampling procedures were the same” (Nunan, 1992, p. 142).

Further details about the participants and the questionnaire procedures for each of the two surveys are discussed separately in the following sections, clarifying for the reader the extent to which representativeness and sample size may be issues.

6.3.1 NZATE survey

This survey was conducted under the auspices of the New Zealand Association for Teachers of English (NZATE) who, because of the Privacy Act, were unable to provide direct access to a mailing list but who agreed to include the questionnaire (see Appendix A) in the 1st June 1998, nationwide mailout. The questionnaire was first designed and trialled locally with an experienced English teacher, following which certain questions were redesigned to minimise ambiguity. The trialled

questionnaires, together with an information sheet, which doubled as an ethical release form (see Appendix B), and a stamped self-addressed envelope, were sent to a total of 350 paid-up NZATE members, all of whom were currently practising regular teachers. Those members not associated with a secondary school were excluded.

Apart from screening for secondary teachers, the sample randomly selected itself in so far as those who returned a questionnaire were those who comprised the sample. There was no control over who the respondents would be and because there was no access to the mailing list it was impossible for the respondents to be identified. This was significant in two respects: it meant, firstly, that those who had not replied within a reasonable period of time could not be sent timely follow-up reminder letters and, secondly, it prevented follow-up analysis of particular respondents through either interviews or case study procedures. This proved to be a major setback in the case of one respondent who would have proved a valuable case study because he clearly presented as a teacher who taught towards critical literacy, overcoming constraints that hindered the majority of others. There was an attempt made to contact this person through the September newsletter which was posted to the same population from which the sample was drawn, but to no avail. To increase the sample size, extra questionnaires were made available to volunteers (who were currently secondary school teachers) at the NZATE conference in Hawkes Bay July 8th – 10th, where an announcement was also made reminding those in the original mailout to return questionnaires. Both of these follow-up activities proved virtually fruitless however, possibly, in the latter instance, because of an assumption made that the majority of members on the NZATE mailing list who had been sent questionnaires were also in attendance at the conference. Of the 63 completed questionnaires received, a wave of 22 arrived on June 8th. By June 15th, one week later, a second wave of 20 questionnaires arrived, making in total two-thirds of all those received. By June 29th, 14 more had arrived, followed by a further 6 in July. The last questionnaire was received on September 4th. The initial prompt response was not to be duplicated. In a more in-

depth study, it would be advisable to analyse these waves as different response groups; within the scope of this present study however, this was not a viability.

6.3.1.1 NZATE questionnaire design

Working from the secondary research questions (see section 5.1.1), and guided by Anderson's (1990) chapter on questionnaire construction, sub-questions were devised and then closely analysed as to whether or not they were absolutely necessary. Several were discarded and in the end 27 items were retained, 7 of which related specifically to background information on the respondents. Of the 20 remaining items, all pertaining to teaching with literature (and which comprised section one of the questionnaire), Anderson's advice was heeded and there was an attempt to keep within a range of 6 basic question formats, which Anderson maintains "will serve most needs And [provide] reliable responses" (p. 209). The design of these questions also sought to maintain a reasonable distribution of both *open-ended* and *closed* questions in order to acquire both qualitative and quantitative data. The question formats used included 15 questions of the *closed* question format (quantitative data) and were made up of the following: six *scales*, 4 of which were *Likert scales* all retaining a neutral mid-point position, 1 *rank order*, and 8 *multiple choice* questions (1 of which was a *filter* question followed by a *branching* question). The 5 remaining questions were *open-ended* (qualitative data) and were designed using the *comment on* format. As *open-ended* questions are far more time consuming to answer, requiring as they do the respondents to use their own words and ideas, these were kept to a minimum and in one instance, where it was possible without alerting bias, examples were provided to act as prompts.

Other aspects of the questionnaire design included: the conscious ordering of questions, that is, grouping those questions that belonged together, related by research objectives and attempting to group those of similar format; the inclusion of questions (1, 2, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, & 18) to double as backup questions for key question 9; beginning the questionnaire with easy to answer non-threatening *closed* questions; finishing the questionnaire with the background information

section which Anderson (1990) cautions can be somewhat threatening if placed at the beginning.

6.3.2 *ESOL survey*

This survey was planned to coincide with the sixth National Conference on Community Languages and ESOL held in Palmerston North 25th-28th September, 1998. The reasons for this were threefold: firstly, to utilise the convenience factor the conference offered of a readily accessible *sampling frame* of teachers who would be representative of a population of ESOL teachers from a range of teaching institutions throughout New Zealand; secondly, to avoid another costly mailout; thirdly to encourage on-the-spot and prompt return of questionnaires (see Appendix C). The conference committee was approached for permission which was granted and so 350 questionnaires, together with the required information/ethical release form (see Appendix D) were handed out at random to participants at the time of registration. It was requested that the completed questionnaires be returned to a box on the registration desk whenever convenient over the four day period of the conference. Despite verbal reminders during notices and written reminders on daily newsletters, the return of these questionnaires also represented little more than a 20% response rate. Altogether, 67 questionnaires were returned, 56 during the four days of the conference and the balance of 11 arriving by post within the following two weeks. This time, no stamped self-addressed envelopes had been provided as it was expected returns would be made at the conference.

6.3.2.1 *ESOL questionnaire design*

This was a less complex questionnaire than the previous one as there were fewer secondary questions to investigate. It was also felt that keeping the questionnaire brief and to the point might improve the response rate. Although short, this questionnaire replicated the process explained in section 6.2.2, brainstorming and then discarding unwanted sub-questions and establishing a balance between question formats, including *open-ended* and *closed* question types. There were a

total of 15 items and of these 13 were *closed* questions (quantitative data) consisting of 5 *multiple choice*, 3 *fill-in-the-blank*, 1 *outline* class composition, 3 *scales*, one of which was a *Likert scale* (with no mid-point position), and another of original design which involved placing a tick on a continuum to indicate teaching focus. The remaining 2 *open-ended* questions (qualitative data) asked respondents to *comment on* aspects of teaching with literature. Unlike the previous questionnaire, which was divided into two sections, this questionnaire though short, consisted of three sections: Background Information was first, with four very non-threatening questions; followed by Teaching Experience and Qualifications, five questions; finally section three, Working with Literature, six questions. As it could not be assumed that all participants at the conference were members of the professional association, a question regarding this matter was included as was one asking about current teaching status.

Apart from assistance from a colleague asked to scan these questions to detect any problems, this questionnaire was not trialled. This did not eventuate in any problems except in the case of one respondent who, failing to turn over the page, left out the third section.

6.4 Data analysis

In the design of the foregoing questionnaires, the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data was planned for. This was to allow for both the emergence of particular patterns and trends analysed through frequency measurements provided by a numerical breakdown of the quantitative data and to invite the detection and interpretation of possible constraints that might emerge through the more descriptive qualitative data. The quantitative data were readily collated, analyzed and interpreted and the numerical values were expressed as a percent of the total number of valid responses in each instance. The percentage of invalid responses was indicated as appropriate. Statistical analysis was also applied to some of this data to determine the significance of emerging patterns. The qualitative data raised issues concerning reliability and are discussed in the following section.

6.4.1 Inter-rater agreement

The qualitative questions were analyzed and interpreted after first being synthesised into quantifiable categories. The emergent data could then be represented in tables. The categories were determined using a combination of key words from the responses and (in the example of question 3 from the NZATE questionnaire) key words from reader-response theory. Any response that was either ambiguous or obscure was treated as miscellaneous.

The reliability of ratings was estimated by calculating the percent of agreements achieved by two raters (one of which included the researcher), on the total number of responses in each of the questions tested. That is, the number of cases where both raters agreed were counted, divided by the total number of responses in the sample, and then multiplied by one hundred. Although individual questions were divided into categories, the percentage of agreement was averaged for each question as a whole. Table 1 summarises the percent of agreement achieved by the raters for each of the questions where inter-rater agreement procedures were conducted.

Table 1. Inter-rater agreement for questions tested

Questions tested	Inter-rater agreement (%)
NZATE survey questions 3	90
4	95
ESOL survey question 12	93

As can be seen, there was relatively high agreement between the two raters suggesting that the study is externally reliable. This in turn “guards against threats to the internal reliability of [the] study” as suggested by Nunan, (1992, p. 15).

Chapter Seven

RESULTS AND OBSERVATIONS

This chapter presents an analysis of the data gathered from the NZATE and ESOL teacher surveys, and in each instance begins with a general breakdown of the demographic information. This is followed by the results of individual questions and groups of questions which are nested in those secondary and general research questions (outlined in chapter 5) which themselves are nested in the major research questions. Some observations regarding the results are also made although discussion of the wider issues is left until chapter 8. A major aim in this chapter is to convey an impression of teachers' reactions to concepts that typify reader-response theories in order to gain as clear a picture as possible of current teaching practice.

7.1 NZATE survey data

In order to check the representativeness of the sample, respondents were asked to include general details about teaching location, (town or city), age and gender.

Table 2. Frequency of NZATE respondents according to age and gender.

Age category in years	Female	Male	Total
20 - 30	4	1	5
31 - 40	11	5	16
41 - 50	15	10	25
51 - 60	13	3	16
60 plus	-	1	1
Total	43	20	63

From the total sample of 63, Table 2 was constructed, indicating a two-thirds predominance of both females over males, and older teachers over younger, consistent with the sampling frame from which this sample was drawn.²⁸ Those teachers in the older age categories (between 40 and 60 plus) average, for females, 22 years teaching experience and, for males in the same category, 25 years experience.²⁹ Female teachers, in the 20 to 40 age category, average 9 years experience and males in the same category average 7.5 years. This information is included for general interest only as any statistical significance regarding these variables and their possible impact on other data was not sought.

7.1.1 Teachers' familiarity with and use of reader-response theories

Of major interest to this study was to gauge teachers' reactions to reader-response theories, hence the first major research question, *To what extent do teachers indicate that they employ a reader-response approach when teaching with literature?* Combining questions one and two (see Appendix A), Table 3 and Figure 2 present responses (as a percentage of the total number of 63 responses) for each of nine categories, eight of which represent concepts considered central to reader-response theories and one *comprehension*, more typical of a New Critical approach. In the case of one respondent, *close reading*, a term which has reappeared with the new English Curriculum,³⁰ had been inserted above the word *comprehension*. In the absence of critical literacy, however, any difference in meaning between these two terms is one of semantics only.

²⁸ This consistency has been based on an estimate provided by a member of the NZATE council (personal communication, 9 November, 1998).

²⁹ *Average* throughout the results section refers to an arithmetic average or mean.

³⁰ *Close reading* is originally a New Critical term, used by I. A. Richards (1929).

Table 3. Frequency of familiarity with and use of response theory concepts in mainstream English

Response Theory concepts	High 100-80%		Moderate 79-50%		Low 49-0%	
	Familiar	Use	Familiar	Use	Familiar	Use
Personal-response	100	100				
Comprehension Questions	98.4	95.2				
Student's prior knowledge	98.4	94.0				
Dominant readings					40.0	21.0
Multiple readings			73.0	51.0		
Marginalised ideas					38.0	19.0
Passive reader			75.0			30.1
Active reader			78.0	51.0		
Deconstructing the text	95.2			75.0		

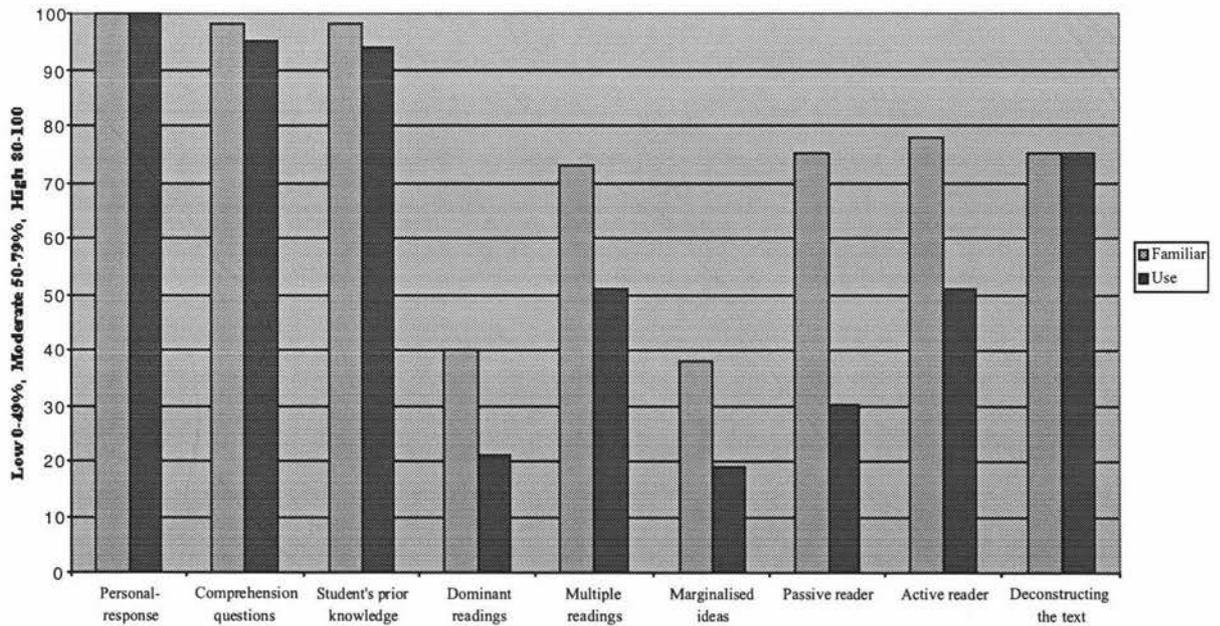


Figure 2. Frequency of familiarity with and use of response theory concepts in mainstream

The responses fall into one of three bands each indicating a measure of frequency, described as *high*, *moderate*, and *low*. What has emerged is that teachers indicated a *high* degree of familiarity with and use of personal-response, comprehension questions, student's prior knowledge and deconstructing the text, though in the case of the latter, *moderate* use only is indicated.³¹ What this figure shows is that teachers have made a clear move towards personal-response suggesting that the new syllabus begun by the NESC in the 70s (see 3.2) based on the personal growth model and valuing the student's voice, has achieved its goal. The following examples from comments made by teachers provide further evidence of this while also throwing light on the secondary research question, *How is personal-response used in a teaching with literature context?*³²

- *Student centred approach, especially at the beginning ... response, response, response – as a model for students' own writing.*
- *Strongly encourage students to keep personal-response journals, especially to register their own initial, thoughtful response before classroom discussion.*
- *Build from students' initial responses and encourage group discussion which deepens knowledge and appreciation.*

Despite the widespread support for personal-response, one respondent teaching in a boys' school made the following interesting observation:

³¹ *Deconstruction* is an example of professional discourse which may not have been understood. This is discussed in chapter 8 under Limitations.

³² This secondary question proved problematic when it came to a quantitative analysis of this data as it was impossible to construct categories from the responses to fit one paradigm; some respondents explained *how*, while others explained *why*.

I find boys are less secure with responding rather than analysing. They're not always keen to make the emotional leap into the literature – prefer to sit back and dissect.

A small number of respondents indicated that their use of personal-response was tempered by some critical thinking as in the following:

- *Development of personal feelings – no party line to follow, but must be able to give reasons for like or dislike of a text. Note, 'it's boring' is not an acceptable response.*
- *I actually seek personal responses from the students and the base from which these responses come. I endeavour to get my students to examine the reasoning behind their responses and to engage in debate over their positions.*
- *I want the students to develop their readings. I model my reading(s) – we deconstruct this – they resist this reading (usually). They look at where their readings are coming from.*

Needless to say, this last example came from a respondent who indicated throughout his questionnaire that he was thoroughly committed to reader-response teaching strategies and critical literacy.³³

The concepts with which teachers appeared to be least familiar, and which fell into the *low* category for use, are those more typical of the social/cultural reader-response concepts such as dominant readings, and marginalised ideas. The *active* reader, key concept of all reader-response theories, fell into the *moderate* band for familiarity though the use of this concept was marginally *low*.

³³ It was this particular respondent an unsuccessful attempt had been made to locate for further close study (see 6.3.1).

Further impressions regarding teachers' reactions to reader-response were gained through the results of the quantified qualitative responses to Question 3 (see Appendix A), which asked teachers to explain their approach to teaching literature, and which have been set out in Table 4 (see Table 1, chapter 6, for inter-rater agreement). This question was analysed using the five major types of reader-response theory (described in chapter 4 and summarised in Figure 1), to which was added a category for *critical thinking*³⁴ and another for *others* (miscellaneous).

Table 4. Percentage of teachers and approaches to teaching with literature

Approaches to literature	Frequency	Percentage
Textual Theories	44	53
Experiential Theories	22	26
Social/Cultural Theories	4	5
Psychological Theories	1	1
Critical Thinking	7	8
Others	6	7
Totals	84	100

Scores in each category are expressed as a percentage based on an aggregate of 84 responses overall (in a number of instances, respondents indicated an approach utilising aspects of more than one of these categories).

The Textual Theories category, which focuses on a structuralist approach and knowledge of text conventions, drew the largest number of responses at 53%. Comments from respondents such as

³⁴ Critical Thinking as specified in the new English curriculum document (1994) and not to be confused with *critical literacy*.

- *still fairly traditional*
- *focus on the story*
- *teaching literature from a thematic approach*
- *an introduction to one of themes/author/background before they see the text, then understanding of the plot, characters, themes and to a lesser extent setting*

were typical of the many responses falling into this category.

The Experiential Theories category, which stresses the importance of the subjective nature of much student-centred learning, through the student's engagement and/or experience with the text, drew the second highest response rate of 26%. This category represented a variety of strategies used by teachers and included drama, role play, written presentations, and static images. The Psychological Theories category, which concerns the teacher involving students in a critical awareness of the cognitive or subconscious processes involved in being an *active* reader, drew the lowest response of 1% and even in this instance the simple response of "*Student centred. Student as active learner*" is open to interpretation. Because Social and Cultural Theories have much in common, these two categories were combined to represent 5% which is consistent with the results for these same concepts that came into the *low* category in Table 3/Figure 2. The Critical Thinking category, which represents those teachers who stated that they encouraged the use of a critical thinking approach was 8%. Comments from several respondents here are interesting in that they clearly indicate a sector of the teaching population committed to reader-response:

- *Influenced by reader-response theory hence cast the student as an active, increasingly critical partner in the making of meaning.*
- *Give senior students critical material presenting a range of views and encourage them to form their own.*

- *Reader-response approach – looking at the ‘way’ we read. That is, our position as a reader. Linked to the ideas of deconstruction and reading in many ways = multiple positions.*

On the other hand there were others in this category who did not make it clear what the students were being asked to think critically about. Critical thinking does not imply an *active* reader as understood by critical literacy; one may think critically on a comparative basis about the ideas of others without engaging in a critical examination of the many factors which influence the formulation of ideas. What this possibly is a reflection of is the lack of clarity concerning professional discourse and is an issue discussed later (see 8.1).

The results that emerged from the next question (see Question 4, Appendix A), suggested, that although a certain number of teachers were aware of reader-response and student-centred methodologies, they nevertheless preferred to use more traditional approaches. A breakdown of the 42 respondents who indicated that they were familiar with ways of teaching other than those they employed, was carried out to determine whether or not the alternative approaches they explained indicated either traditional teaching methodologies or reader-response methodologies. The results of this breakdown are shown in Table 5 and include five categories.

Of the total number of responses, most (category 3) were associated with a preference for a teacher-directed approach involving such traditional text-based strategies as setting a lot of questions and assignment work. Those who indicated an awareness of reader-response and student-centred approaches (categories 1 and 2 respectively) as alternative methodologies, raise questions as to what might constrain these teachers in both instances from using these methodologies. Of further interest is the relatively large group of 36% (categories 4 and 5 combined), whose answers were either blank or miscellaneous.

Table 5. Percentage of teachers and awareness of alternative approaches to teaching with literature

Alternative approaches	Frequency	Percentage
Reader-response	6	14
Experiential (student-centred)	7	17
Teacher-directed, text-based	14	33
Miscellaneous	6	14
No details provided	9	22
Totals	42	100

The final question in this section was the closed question concerning the actual use of reader-response criticism (see Question 9, Appendix A). The results indicated that 44% were *unsure*, 43% *agreed*, while as few as 9% *strongly agreed* to using reader-response. A further 3%, *disagreed* which may in fact be the group discussed above, who were aware of reader-response but chose not to use it. Because there was evidence of confusion as to what reader-response actually was, for example “*I think so. I’m just not sure of the jargon*”; “*If by reader-response you mean personal response*”; and “*Does reader-response mean something different from personal-response?*”, it was decided to analyse those respondents who had *strongly agreed* more closely against other reader-response focused questions (see Questions 17, 18, Appendix A³⁵). What emerged is that 67% of this small subset (6 respondents in all) *disagreed* with the essential use of handout material for *best* ideas, and also ranked the *student interest in subject matter* for both seniors and juniors as of number one importance. This means that, in keeping with reader-

³⁵ See Appendix E, Table E1 for the results of Question 17.

response theories, the students' ideas are the *best* ones and when it comes to teachers selecting literary texts, student interest has primacy over other considerations. The remainder of 33% *agreed* to the essential use of handout material and ranked *established critical reputation* as number one in text selection, which raises questions concerning the extent to which reader-response criticism is used in practice. What this suggests is that of the 63 respondents in the survey, only 4 (or 6% overall) indicated the use of reader-response based consistently on an appreciation of the key concepts which are unequivocally both student-centred and fully appreciative of the role played by context.

By way of comparison, the 43% who *agreed* to using reader-response were also analysed against the same questions (17 and 18), but there was little in these results to corroborate the foregoing findings. Regarding the essential nature of handout material (Question 17), there was no clear margin of difference in responses; 29% were *not sure*, 36% *disagreed* and 32% *agreed*. However, two respondents who *disagreed* added the qualifications that handout material was, "*not essential but an extra*" and that it "*opened minds to previous commentators' ideas*". Clearly there is a need for further research in this area. What was of interest is that 64% ranked *students' interest in subject matter* as the number one consideration for juniors as compared with the lesser figure of 36%, who ranked *students' interest* number one for seniors. The difference in approach between juniors and seniors is analysed further under 7.1.2.1.

7.1.2 Constraints

The second key concern was to determine what constraints might operate in each of the two contexts under study, hence the major research questions: *What constraints operate in both mainstream and ESOL English classrooms that may prevent the development of critical literacy? And, Are these constraints different in each context?* Questions, 5, 6, 7 and 8 (see Appendix A) reflect matters related to professional development, the lack of which is perceived as a major constraint.

Of the 64% of respondents who answered ‘yes’ to experiencing professional development related to teaching literature (see Question 5, Appendix A), 63% of these *agreed* that their approach to teaching literature had been changed by the professional development undertaken (see Question 7, Appendix A), while a further 10% *strongly agreed*. Of these who strongly agreed, one respondent added “*I run the workshop myself*”, another that she had developed a research paper in her Honours year in Education at Canterbury University on “*New ways of looking at texts*”, while a third respondent had undertaken “*a year-long course for teacher trainees at Auckland University*”. This suggests that level of personal commitment to the professional development may well be a factor in its efficacy.

Fifteen percent of the respondents to this question were *not sure*, and 12% *disagreed* that the professional development had had any affect on their teaching approach. While it is clear that these results favour the ongoing availability of *effective* professional development to teachers, there are limitations to this set of questions insofar as not all the responses (see Question 6, Appendix A) specified professional development necessarily related to the teaching of literature: 53% of the responses referred to either NZATE conference workshops; NZQA³⁶ new curriculum and unit standards training; regional association courses; or some combination of each of these, while 18% specified attendance at a course specific to either some literary genre for example, *Shakespeare and Theatre*, *English through Drama*, *Looking at the Short Story*, or to either juniors or seniors such as *Poetry for Juniors* and *Bursary Literature*. A further 11% had attended a course in *Film* and/or *Visual Language* and as few as 4% named a course specific to the teaching of literature such as *Strategies for teaching literature*, *Active approaches to literary texts* and *Workshop on reader-response theory*. Of these three named courses, only two are clearly to do with reader-response (see Appendix F, Table F1, for a breakdown of professional development data).

³⁶ NZQA i.e. New Zealand Qualifications Authority.

7.1.2.1 Differences in approaches with juniors and seniors; L1 and mainstreamed L2

The nature of the class proved to be a source of constraint regarding the flexibility a teacher may have to employ strategies that could lead to critical literacy. Regarding the secondary question *Is there any noticeable difference between the approaches teachers adopt with juniors and seniors; L1 and mainstreamed L2* (see Questions 11 and 12, Appendix A), to Question 11, 85% said ‘yes’ they did teach juniors differently from seniors while 15% answered ‘no’ but in every instance the ‘no’ was followed by some such qualification as “*only in degree*”, “*not really*”, “*not essentially*”, “*just less dense*”, “*not hugely*”, and “*but intensity differs*”. Seven percent of those who answered in the affirmative noted that a behavioural factor put a constraint on the approach adopted, offering such comments as, “*discipline is a larger issue*”, and “*only if management of behaviour requires lessons to be more structured*”. These comments reflect further constraints to critical literacy, as well as the reality of certain teaching situations that may well be representative of the student group referred to in Beach’s comment (see 4.2.6 Cultural Theories), i.e. students who have been so affected by detrimental forces that they are not receptive to questioning the dominant social and cultural norms. My own experience with some juniors in a school once rated decile 3 can endorse the comments made here.

As well as behavioural reasons, 26% of this affirmative group noted that examinations were a determining factor in the way they approached these two groups, thus affirming the secondary question: *Are examination requirements a factor in determining choices teachers make in respect to 2.1?* The following statements from teachers are typical of the many comments made regarding the affects of examination/assessment requirements on teaching approaches:

- *With seniors I am less learner centred and more assessment driven.*
- *My approach with seniors is exam based and structured.*
- *Seniors give seminars, lessons more structured, more complex, more lecturing from me and less variety of teaching methods.*

- *Exam pressure requires much stronger teaching direction.*
- *Exams mean that with seniors I teach more conventional features such as plot, setting, theme ...*
- *Heavily exam based ... exam prescriptions impose framework.*

Several of these responses are evocative of a *text as artefact* approach and the guiding of students' personal-responses towards pre-determined interpretations, as discussed earlier in 3.3, in the section dealing with the limitations of personal-response. A further breakdown of the explanations showed that of the 85% who answered in the affirmative, 20% said they focused more on personal-response with juniors than they did with seniors and a further 24% found that juniors allowed more scope for creativity. A final group of 36% clearly indicated that with juniors they focused less on form/structure. The results clearly indicate that examination requirements necessitate more stringency in teaching methods with senior classes, though how widespread this might be could only be determined by further research.

When it came to teachers adopting a different approach with mainstreamed ESOL students, (see Question 12, Appendix A), results seemed initially to indicate less divergence of response than to the previous question, with 54% answering in the affirmative, and 46% saying 'no'. However of those who answered 'no', 21% qualified their answer to add that they nevertheless employed a number of strategies to assist ESOL students in that they selected graded readers and easier texts, simplified vocabulary and modified their own delivery. These same strategies were also those used by 43% of the affirmative group. Probably, then, more teachers do respond to the needs of their ESOL students through the conscious adoption of a simplified approach than the 54% suggests.

The issue of mainstreamed ESOL students poses several constraints for teachers and comments suggest that mainstreaming is not necessarily the best solution for the students. For example several teachers noted that they had a lower performance expectation for their ESOL students while 6% made the observation

that their ESOL students did not get the attention they needed. Only 17% indicated that either the teachers or the students were supported in some way by the ESOL department. The clear constraint emerging here for teachers is that it is incumbent upon them to prepare two lots of resources and adopt a flexible range of teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students in heterogeneous classrooms. Both ends of a coping continuum are reflected in the comments made by teachers. For example, one respondent said that he “*gave one-on-one help*”, another that he used the situation to “*invite cultural comparisons*” thus utilising a given teaching opportunity, while others noted that “*ESOL tend to flounder*”, and “*only a handful in any one class, so they sink or swim*”.

7.1.2.2 Further problems facing the regular English teacher

Questions related specifically to mainstreamed ESOL and answering the secondary question *Do mainstreamed ESOL students pose problems for regular teachers?*, is examined in the results to questions 19 and 20 (see Appendix A). Thirty one percent were *not sure* of the value of focusing on personal interpretations of texts with ESOL students while 13% both *agreed* and *strongly agreed* that such an approach was inappropriate. However, a majority of 56% *disagreed* and *strongly disagreed* with this statement thus implying that personal-response was not widely perceived as a problem but rather, teachers were convinced of its value for ESOL students. There were a large number of reaffirming comments offered here such as

- *Different cultural perspectives are important. Personal interpretation is a key factor in any study of text.*
- *ESOL students only have problems with the language, not the ideas. Their responses are valid.*
- *Engaging with text is critical to all teaching.*
- *Critical thinking skills are in need of exercise regardless of one's language limitations.*

The comments made by those who did not agree with the value of personal response for ESOL all mentioned language-learning as being more important, thus echoing the arguments of Nick Gadd (see 2.5, Teacher variables in the ESOL context).

The results of the final question (see Question 20, Appendix A), relating to the problems incurred teaching literature with mainstreamed ESOL, raised further constraints for teachers to overcome. The problems were categorised into six core problem areas (see Table 6), though there was an assortment of individual teacher problems not all considered pertinent to ESOL alone which were excluded. There was also a high percentage of non-response at 30%. The following percentages were based on a sample of 76 responses as most of those who answered indicated

Table 6. Percentage of problem areas encountered by teachers of mainstreamed ESOL students

Problem areas	Frequency	Percentage
Student's lack of confidence	7	9
Not enough time	7	9
Cultural differences	14	19
Differences in teaching/learning styles	7	9
Colloquial and figurative language	12	16
Language (e.g. vocab.) of text too difficult	29	38
Totals	76	100

more than one problem area. As might be expected, the language factor (categories 5 and 6 together), represented the area where most problems occurred while cultural/educational factors represented the second largest. What was interesting was the number who indicated that differences in teaching/learning styles were problematic: without some basic training in working with mainstreamed ESOL

students, teachers are put under unreasonable pressure while students might indeed *flounder*.

7.2 ESOL survey data

The demographic data for the ESOL survey was different from the NZATE survey in that it included information concerning the distribution of teachers according to type of learning institution. Nevertheless, the aim here was also to check the representativeness of this sample against the sampling frame. The type of learning institution, together with age category and gender are set out in Table 7. What this shows is that, of the 67 respondents, again there was a predominance of females over males (a ratio of 8:1) and older teachers over younger, consistent with the sampling frame, as confirmed by a recent study by Dan Haddock (1998), profiling the ESOL profession.

Of the total number of respondents, 79% were members of TESOLANZ³⁷ leaving a balance of 21% who were not. This variable was not applied to any other data

Table 7. Frequency of ESOL respondents according to age, gender and learning institution

Age category in years	Primary		Private		Tertiary		Secondary		Total
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
20 - 30	1	-	3	-	3	-	-	-	7
31 - 40	1	-	3	-	3	1	4	-	12
41 - 50	1	-	1	-	8	2	13	1	26
51 - 60	1	-	3	-	6	3	6	-	19
60 plus	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	3
Total	4	0	10	0	20	6	26	1	67

³⁷ TESOLANZ: i.e. the NZ professional body for ESOL teachers nationwide.

although the type of learning institution was conceptually significant especially in relation to the use of literature as discussed later. By far the largest number, taught in either tertiary or secondary contexts which was also consistent with Haddock's study which found that the largest bulk of TESOLANZ members teach in secondary and tertiary institutions.

7.2.1 Working with literature

The following data were analysed to answer the general question, *To what extent do teachers teach with literature in the language classroom?* Table 8 presents data analysed in response to Question 10 (see Appendix C). The percentages have been worked out for each of four categories/genre (horizontal axis), based in each instance on the frequency of responses occurring in each category. The proportion of time spent on each genre (vertical axis) is also shown.

Table 8. Frequency (F) and percentage of time spent teaching in 4 categories of literature in the language classroom

Proportion of time	Novel		Short Story		Poetry		Other e.g. plays, journals, children's fiction	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Little or none	34	60	16	27	31	55	-	-
Sometimes	21	37	35	59	23	41	7	64
About half	1	1.5	4	7	-	-	-	-
More than half	-	-	3	5	1	2	2	18
Most or all	1	1.5	1	2	1	2	2	18
Totals	57	100	59	100	56	100	11	100

What this table shows is that based on an aggregate of 183 responses (the 4 categories totalled), 47% indicated that they *sometimes* used literature of any of the genre listed here which compares with 44% who indicated *little or no* use of

literature in any form. What small amount of use is indicated in the *most or all* category is largely the response of one respondent who taught a literature course to L2 students at tertiary level. Of those who *sometimes* taught with literature, based on an aggregate of 86 responses, most (41%), indicated a preference for the short story which compares with 24% for the novel, and 27% for poetry. A very small percentage (8%), indicated that they *sometimes* used some other genre. A breakdown to compare results within learning institution (using the *sometimes* category only) for novels, short stories, poetry and other, and to see how widespread the use of literature was outside of pre-tertiary education was also carried out (see Appendix G, Tables G 1 and G 2). What is indicated is that all institutions, with the exception of the primary sector, make greater use of short stories than any other genre. The primary sector appears to put equal emphasis on poetry and big picture books which is possibly a reflection of curriculum requirements. Also, by comparing the number of responses in secondary and tertiary, relative to the total number of respondents represented by each (see Table G 1), it is clear that more literature is taught in secondary schools which is also a reflection of the curriculum. A comment made by one respondent from a polytechnic suggests other factors however:

I don't teach literature at all - partly because I'm not sure how to, though I'm interested, and partly because my students haven't shown any interest.

Reading for leisure, not generally understood to be a part of Asian culture, may explain the last part of this comment while professional development would assist with the lack of professional expertise expressed here.

The preference across the board for short stories rather than for novels was explained by one secondary teacher as a time constraint:

I would love to spend more time on literature but other things take precedence due to limited hours. It takes such a long time to work through a novel. I guess I'm not sure of what is available at the right level.

It would be valuable to know how many other teachers might endorse these comments in support of a case for professional development funding.

7.2.2 Literature focus in the ESOL classroom

What is the major focus for those teachers who do teach with literature? is the second general question to be addressed. The major focus has been interpreted from data relating to both resources teachers use (see Question 11, Appendix C), and teaching approach (see Questions 12 and 15, Appendix C) and is set out in Table 9.

Table 9. Frequency (F) and percentage of literary resources used

Graded readers		Anthologies (Short stories, plays)		School journals		Personal resources on file		Other		Total	
F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
37	35	12	11	30	28	9	8	15	14	107	100

The results concerning resources were based on an aggregate of 107 responses and shown as a percentage for each of five categories. These categories were created from responses which in turn had been assisted by prompts within the question. The category *other* consists of a range of miscellaneous resources such as newspaper articles, Learning Media material and films/videos.³⁸ What these results indicated was that graded readers and school journals represented the most frequently used literary resources by a notable margin.

The major focus for teachers is further examined in the data related to Questions 12 and 15 (see Appendix C). Question 12 was analysed using categories derived from key words in the responses considered pertinent to the literature teaching

³⁸ *Literature* was liberally interpreted by many in this survey to include almost any written text.

criteria used throughout this study, in particular those relating to the motifs *text as linguistic resource* and *text as artefact* (see Table 1 for inter-rater agreement). Table 10 sets out the following six categories with data expressed as a percentage of an aggregate of 133 responses.

Table 10. Percentage of approaches to teaching with literature in the language classroom

<i>Text as linguistic resource</i>	<i>Text as artefact</i> i.e. characters, plot, theme etc.	Social/cultural contexts	Emphasis on Literature capital 'L'	Literature for fun	Miscellaneous	Total
29	33	23	3	3	9	100

Of the 67 respondents, 13% responded in one category only, 16% gave no response, while 71% indicated that they approached literature with more than one focus in mind. These approaches were not ranked.

In order to see how the type of learning institution impacted on teaching with literature the miscellaneous category was further analysed against Question 9 (see Appendix C) which provided a description of the student group worked with. Results here were particularly interesting and showed that of this group, 45% had scope within their course objectives to include literature but they appeared to be locked into stereotypical course parameters. Such courses suggesting some degree of flexibility included, *Teaching English for academic purposes*, and *English for oral communication practice*. A further 45% were clearly limited by the more specialist nature of their courses for example *Business (Commerce Certificate)*, *Study skills*, and *Workplace Language*. In one instance, a teacher worked with *Literacy for the deaf* and in another *Absolute beginning adults*.

7.2.3 Familiarity and use of reader-response concepts

This last section relates to the first major research question, *To what extent do teachers indicate that they employ a reader-response approach?* Questions 12 and

13 (see Appendix C) were analysed as outlined for the identical questions in the NZATE questionnaire and the results are presented in Table 11 and Figure 3.

Table 11. Frequency of familiarity with and use of reader-response concepts in the language classroom

Response Theory concepts	High 100-80%		Moderate 79-50%		Low 49-0%	
	Familiar	Use	Familiar	Use	Familiar	Use
Personal-response	95.0	87.0				
Comprehension Questions	98.3	89.0				
Student's prior knowledge	98.3	87.0				
Dominant readings					11.4	7.0
Multiple readings			59.0			48.0
Marginalised ideas					33.0	7.0
Passive reader			56.0			N/A
Active reader			67.2	54		
Deconstructing the text			66.0	52.4		

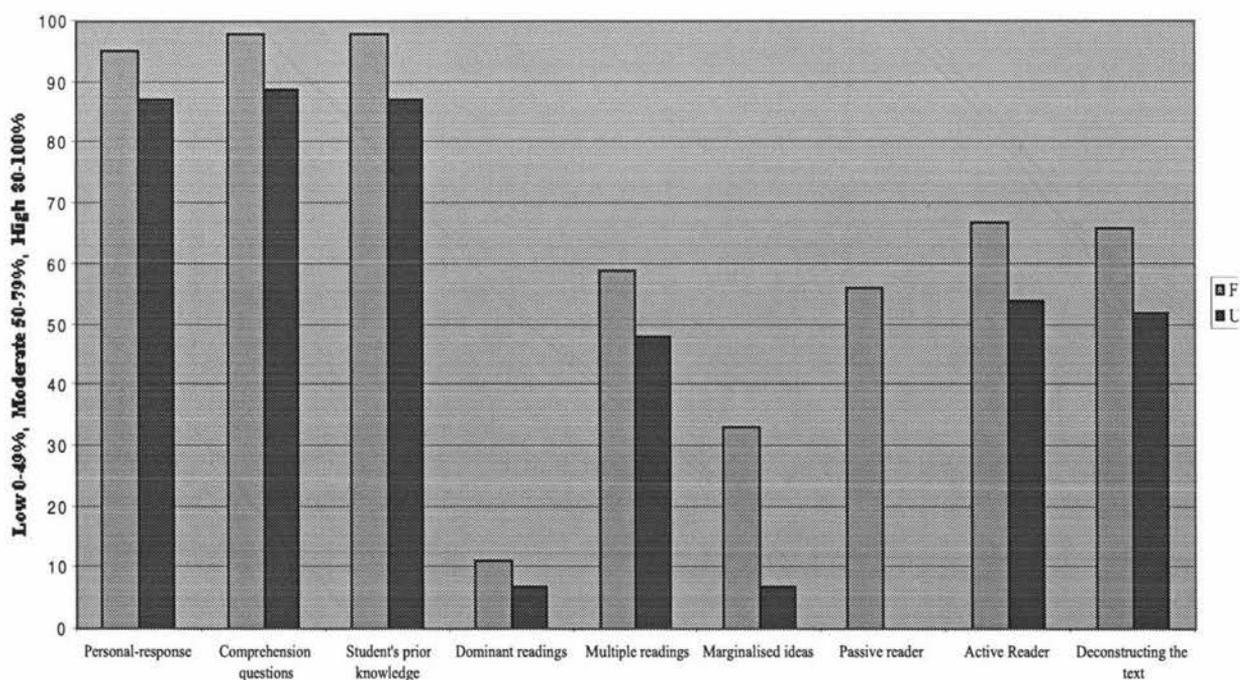


Figure 3. Frequency of familiarity with and use of response theory concepts in the language classroom

Of the 61 or 91% who responded, the results showed that, as with the NZATE data, personal-response, comprehension questions, and students' prior knowledge indicated a *high* degree of familiarity and use. Of the other concepts, multiple readings, passive reader, active reader and text deconstruction all indicated a *moderate* degree of familiarity, but of these four, only active reader and text deconstruction indicated *moderate* use. Those concepts which indicated a *low* degree of familiarity and use (as with the NZATE data) were dominant readings and marginalised ideas.³⁹ An interpretation of these results is discussed in the following chapter.

The final results that emerged related to the continuum (see Question 15, Appendix C) and indicated that teachers were more focused on the personal-responses of the students than they were with text-based interpretations. Forty nine percent were student-centred compared with 19% who were text-based. However, there was a further 32% who fell half-way between which may suggest a view of literature as *text as artefact*.

7.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented quantitative results, made observations concerning these results and interpreted a range of qualitative data attesting to the largely exploratory nature of this study. Comments from respondents have been included to convey as accurate an impression as possible of current teaching practice. Much of the data is open to conjecture raising more questions than are answered, however, some clear trends have emerged, the interpretation of which is discussed in the following chapter.

³⁹ Note that the concept of the *passive* reader, regarding use, was not included in Question 13.

Chapter Eight

DISCUSSION

This chapter is largely concerned with discussing key ideas that emerge from the results and which also pertain to the original thesis statements. The first section discusses briefly some of the limitations of the research which is followed by discussion of findings for the mainstreamed context (including mainstreamed ESOL), and a section on ESOL alone. Throughout this discussion, I will make links to the earlier chapters where appropriate, and convey as accurate an impression as possible of teachers' understanding of their current practice.

8.1 Limitations

Several limitations emerge regarding this study which little could have been done to prevent. The first of these concerns the use of professional discourse throughout the questionnaires, teachers' misunderstanding of which gives rise to some inconsistencies. Language meanings change, and the layering of new meanings over old is certain to create ambiguity. Two terms, namely *deconstructing the text*, and *active reader*, are clearly ambiguous, while a third, *critical thinking*, has elicited various understandings.

The first of these, *deconstructing the text*, tends to have been understood as any unravelling or taking apart of text structure as in the study of *text as artefact*, i.e. in the traditional, structural, approach (setting, plot, theme, and characters etc. which collectively are referred to as aspects of the novel⁴⁰). Deconstruction, in a poststructuralist context, requires *reading/unravelling* with critical analysis, and in so doing questioning dominant readings. Bill Green (1997), drawing on Derrida, describes this process as "textual politics" (p. 230), and makes the point that

⁴⁰ Or play, poetry, short story etc.

“Deconstruction is to be grasped as a strategy, an attitude, a stance towards texts, institutions, the social world and Being itself” (p. 231). The difficulties encountered with this term possibly explain why, in the results section of the NZATE survey (see footnote 31, 7.1.1), such a large number of respondents indicate the *use* of deconstruction, yet only a comparatively small number indicate that they are even *familiar* with the idea of *dominant readings*, which are the very readings deconstruction seeks to question. This same inconsistency arises in the ESOL survey.

The other terms similarly give rise to understandable inconsistencies which, as with deconstruction, are evidence of the way reader-response theories have remained stuck in the theoretical and not become more accessible to teachers. What this means is that these limitations do in fact enlighten the study. In the case of *active reader*, for example (which failed to produce a close correlation with *multiple readings*), the lack of instruction in *reading* in secondary teacher training is indicated.⁴¹ A similar survey carried out among primary trained teachers may well produce different results. For a secondary English teacher however, the results suggest that a student is an *active reader* if s/he takes an active role in class discussion and proffers a personal-response/opinion. What this implies is that structuralist binaries such as active/passive need to be re-examined in the light of poststructuralist thinking. *Active* needs to be understood regarding its role in the creation by students of critically examined meanings.

In addition to these terms, *personal experience* also proved problematic and needs clarifying. What Rosenblatt means largely by experience, not discounting biographical experience, is explained by her term *transaction* which involves *thinking* as well as *feeling* (see under 4.2 Active reader and 4.2.3 Experiential Theories). The lack of understanding of *experience*, as *transaction* between the individual reader and the text to create meaning reflects further on the limitations

⁴¹ The question of teaching *reading* to secondary English teachers is only mentioned here in passing as it is a much bigger issue than can be undertaken within the confines of this study.

of *personal-response* and the fact that teachers are stuck in the affective zone. Another way of saying this is, more simply, to echo the widely held view that secondary teachers in particular lack training specific to teaching *reading*.

A further limitation to the study arose from the apparent resistance from teachers to certain new paradigms, as suggested by the comment “*this term annoys me*”, made by one respondent in reference to deconstructing the text. Also, a paradigm may be understood, but a teacher might choose not to act on it, having not been convinced of its efficacy. (This may or may not be the explanation for the results of Question 4 where it was found that by choice, teachers aware of more recent developments in literary theory chose to practice more traditionally.) It is also difficult for teachers to reflect on their praxis, that is, what they actually do in the classroom, as opposed to what they believe they do. Delving into teachers’ understanding and trying to get their responses are problems related to methodology so that a series of in-depth interviews may have produced more clarity.

8.2 Mainstreamed secondary English context

8.2.1 Personal-response and reader-response. How are these perceived?

It is clearly evident from the results (see Table 3/Figure 2), that current teaching practice of literature incorporates the use of reader-response theories predominantly derived from the earlier response theories, such as the Textual Theories (which in practice were considerably influenced by New Criticism and structuralism, (see 4.2.2), and the Experiential Theories (which valued the student’s experience - both the biographical and “lived through” experience with the text, see 4.2.3). Strongly affecting the implementation into practice of these earlier theories was the concurrent emphasis on personal-response, through, for one, the personal-growth teaching model and its emphasis on the affective, together with the student’s individual *voice* (see 3.1). Without a doubt, the results are evidence of a widespread commitment to personal-response, which may or

may not be used interchangeably with the term reader-response (refer back to 7.1.1 for discussion of this issue).

Respondents indicate that they use personal-response primarily to engage students with their own emotional responses to the meanings that arise from within texts: students are encouraged to empathise with the situations of characters, they are encouraged to relate and compare their own experiences with those that arise in the text, and they are sometimes invited to respond to teacher-directed starters relating mostly to themes and or characters. Personal-response is also used by some to encourage critical thinking. In support of Sheehan's advocacy of a moral and ethical stance as defining aspects of critical literacy (see 2.2 and 5.3), a very few respondents state that they use personal-response to encourage students to make value judgements about the actions of characters as in "*I like (or don't like) so and so because ...*". However, how *critical* is defined is not always made so clear.

Further evidence that the earlier reader-response theories have the greater impact on practice is the strong support teachers give to using students' *prior knowledge* and *comprehension* (see also Table 3/Figure 2). Prior knowledge relates closely to both these early theories: it embraces the student's existing knowledge of text conventions, which is important to the Textual Theorists (see 4.2.2 and the comment about intertextuality), and the student's biographical knowledge or experience, (applied through personal-response to assist in engaging and empathising with the text) which is valued by the Experiential Theorists. Comprehension, on the other hand, is an outmoded pedagogical practice used widely by the New Critics, which needs to be developed into a clear understanding of *close reading*, one subsumed under critical literacy. This focus on the comprehension of a text-based meaning (*text as artefact*) is what threatens more than anything else the development of critical literacy and which creates the conundrum surrounding the limitations of personal-response.

The results further indicate that personal-response has also carried over into teaching with mainstreamed ESOL students (see 7.1.2.2 for teacher comments),⁴² and indicate besides that with ESOL students there is not the same examination-pressure that exists with other senior L1 students. This could also be explained by the greater flexibility in curriculum planning with this group. However, despite the 56% support for personal-response with mainstreamed ESOL students, it is important to be reminded of the balance of respondents who all stressed that language learning was what they perceived as their students' first priority, thus raising questions regarding the value of a humanistic approach in the language classroom. There is also the observation made by several respondents (similar to that made earlier in respect to the L1 boys that one teacher found preferred analysis to personal-response), to the effect that

Asian students feel very insecure about personal-response – it's a very foreign concept to many of them. Since I also provide notes later, they can weather most of the earlier response work.

This may well be a reflection of teacher preference, or lack of oral proficiency on the part of the students, or different learning styles or even extreme cultural sensitivity on the part of teachers. Whatever the reason, this is a matter professional development can help alleviate for the regular teacher working with mainstreamed ESOL students.

Results from questions designed to assess the extent to which teachers are singularly committed to the poststructuralist reader-response theories, i.e. the Social and Cultural theories, which embrace a new awareness of *text as discourse*, indicate a very small number of respondents at 6%. This finding affirms the first thesis statement that *Teachers' use of and familiarity with reader-response*

⁴² These comments bring a clarity to what some teachers perceive as the function of personal-response, such as encouraging different cultural perspectives, personal interpretations, engagement with text, the exploration of ideas, the validity of the student's voice, and the development of critical thinking.

theories is limited. However, reader-response theories cover a diverse range of concepts, including all that is valuable about personal-response, so that what actually emerges is that all teachers indicate the use of some aspects of reader-response theories, but the poststructuralist response theories which stress the role of contexts both social and cultural in shaping discourse are apparent only to a very few. It is only by incorporating these contextual factors into teaching with literature (or any text for that matter) that critical literacy can come about.

8.2.2 Constraints preventing the development of critical literacy in mainstream classrooms

The results concerning the section of the second thesis statement relating to mainstreamed students, i.e. *There are constraints operating in ... mainstream classrooms that prevent the development of critical literacy*, indicate that because of the nature of the constraints that emerge, the solution to the development of critical literacy is not straightforward. Clearly *teacher development* constraints emerge as significant, so there is a need for effective professional development in the limitations of personal-response and the aspects of reader-response theories that focus on *active reading* strategies and introduce to teachers the idea of *text as discourse*.⁴³ But, to achieve a level of success in practice, other constraints need to be recognised and, in the most optimistic scenario, overcome.

8.2.2.1 Curriculum

The first of these concerns the matter of examinations/assessment which are clearly a factor for many of those who agreed to teaching seniors differently from juniors. The pressure of ensuring examination success means simply that teachers become more expedient in their approach. From my own experience, I found this

⁴³ It is necessary to point out that the 27% of respondents who were unable to confirm the value of the professional development undertaken regarding their approach to teaching literature could be a reflection of the 53% who did not specify some connection between their course and the teaching of literature (see Appendix E).

to be true, as students who were unable to express relevant ideas of their own (the consequence possibly of many years of passive learning) let alone display some degree of essay writing fluency (see Stotsky's arguments raised in relation to the limitations of personal-response in 3.3), could only possibly produce two sides of an essay in exam conditions with the help of mind-maps or mnemonics or other such memory-jogging devices. If it is true that an active imagination improves memory as Stevick claims (see reference to this in 3.3), then this further lends support to the greater use of creative strategies with seniors. Further, Bursary students may face exams with some degree of subjective emotional response to the literature studied, but the integration of these responses into committed views and transactional writing will be impaired in the absence of objectivity/critical literacy.⁴⁴

The internal assessment procedures (which came about through a review of assessment carried out by the NESC in the early 80s, see footnote 15, chapter 3) allow more scope, but the situation is far from remedied. No assessment at all is not the answer, but neither is an examination system with the rigid criteria that invites prescriptive teaching as occurs with Bursary. However, as stated earlier (see 3.3), the problem lies also in teaching pedagogy.

What was particularly meaningful in comments that teachers made about the way they taught juniors, was the greater emphasis given to creativity and the imagination and the fact that nearly twice as many teachers ranked *students' interest in subject matter* in text selection as more important for juniors than seniors. This raises the question of just how student-centred is teaching at senior level? Every teacher uses personal-response and Table 3/Figure 2 indicate that nearly one third of teachers utilise experiential strategies (i.e. as in focus on student's own experience), but assessment and curriculum demands have created a paradox for teachers. Educational principles such as student-centred learning need

⁴⁴It would be an area for further research to examine the extent to which a lack of writing fluency correlates with an absence of clearly and strongly held views.

also to be subsumed under critical literacy before they are fully realised. In the meantime, the inability of students to relate affectively to literature chosen for them prejudices their chances of making meaningful responses upon which to build thoughtful critical literacy.

8.2.2.2 Students' receptivity

As far as junior classes are concerned, what appears to be a greater opportunity for teachers to work in the development of critical literacy is in fact also constrained by the behaviour of students themselves. Teachers who comment on behavioural difficulties make it clear that what functions best is a disciplined and structured approach. This of course is an anathema to critical literacy, dependent as it is on an environment of interaction built on trust (see Dixon's comment 2.5). But in practice what other solution is there, other than this pragmatic one?

This area of constraint links to many factors lying outside the control of the school (as indicated in 7.1.2.1, and the comments made by Beach). A local example is the case of a decile one school in the North Island, whose teachers recently became aware of the critical extent to which poor nutrition underlies many of the behavioural and learning difficulties in their school (personal communication, 20 January, 1999). Beach (1993) did not specify poor nutrition in the impoverished conditions he outlined (see 4.2.6), but he might just as well have done so. Forces of poverty are manifested in various social ills which rob those vulnerable of more than their receptivity to new ideas.

8.3 ESOL context across primary, secondary and tertiary institutions

8.3.1 Literature: How much and what?

Of major interest in this section is to gain some impression of how much literature is used in the language teaching classroom and which genre predominates. Results of the first query indicate that just under half the respondents (44%) do not use literature (as defined in 2.1) at all. A number of reasons emerge which offer some

explanation for this, such as lack of knowledge on the part of the teacher, specialist language course requirements, and the inaccessibility of suitable material. By far the biggest factor, however, appears to be related to curriculum and the fact that the majority of those who do teach with literature are from secondary schools where there is possibly more exposure to literature through its central position in mainstream English. Whether or not teachers believe literature should be taught in language classrooms was not sought (see 2.4 and 2.5 for discussion on why teach with literature? and teacher variables), but there is an indication from several with specialist courses, for example Business English, and English for travelling in New Zealand, that "*literature was not relevant*". This is an area for further research as the results here merely skim the surface of what is, in fact, a perennial issue. In respect to McRae's comment (see 2.4) regarding "the strong theoretical undercurrent advocating the use of literature in language teaching (McRae, 1996, p. 16-17), perhaps *theoretical* is the operative word here and, in practice, literature is not extensively used in ESOL classrooms.

It is not surprising that of those who do teach with literature, short stories were clearly the preferred genre. Again, without further research one can only surmise that possibly the brevity of short stories is a major factor in explaining their relative popularity. What is surprising in this section is that 34% of respondents *sometimes* use poetry, a greater number than the 31% who *sometimes* use novels. The type of poetry is no doubt critical as poetry, being rich in metaphor, is less accessible to students than graded readers/novels. As with the role of literature in the language classroom, these matters too are wide open to conjecture until further research.

8.3.2 Teachers' understanding of response theories

Also significant to this study, is the extent to which those teaching with literature in the ESOL classroom view personal and reader-response. It was rather a surprise to note the close similarities in results between both surveys, on the same personal-response/reader-response questions. Numbers are a little down regarding the use of personal-response by language teachers (a difference of 10%), but the general

trends are the same, indicating that most understanding of response theories focuses on personal-response and a close link with the earlier reader-response theories (i.e. the Textual and Experiential).

One area that was a surprise was the indication that marginally more of the language teachers who did work with literature used an approach more indicative of *text as artefact* (33%) than *text as linguistic resource* (29%) (see Table 10). The greater focus on text-based study here might explain why literature is not more popular among language teachers, in that many may be under the impression that teaching literature involves specialist learning objectives, which include knowledge of a metalanguage that must be passed on to the students (see 2.5, Teacher variables in the ESOL context). It would be interesting to follow up with the 3% of teachers who stated that they taught literature for fun, as these teachers are clearly unhampered by any pre-conceptions of what teaching with literature may or may not involve. Too many questions remain unanswered however, such as how many of the ESOL teachers were originally regular English teachers, and therefore influenced by previous practice?

Despite the emphasis on the more traditional approaches suggested here, ESOL teachers nevertheless indicate, in comparison with regular teachers, a greater focus on the *social* and *cultural* contexts in texts. This is possibly more a reflection of teachers being sensitive to the multicultural nature of their classrooms and the opportunities that literature provides for exploring issues of difference, than it is a reflection of approaches derived from poststructuralist response theories which treat *text as discourse*. Nevertheless, the very nature of these classrooms paves the way for critical literacy which might only then be hampered by low levels of language proficiency.⁴⁵ Once again there is the need for further research to come up with some answers.

⁴⁵ Students' receptivity, as understood for this study is, I believe, also an issue in some secondary ESOL classrooms, but this constraint did not emerge in the data gathered.

One thing does emerge regarding the value or otherwise of students' responses and that is the greater number of ESOL teachers who indicated that they valued the personal-responses of their students in arriving at meanings than those who indicated a preference for more text-based interpretations. As with other results, however, there could be many explanations for this, such as the absence of exams (hence less need for coherence especially in written form). Also there is the focus in language classrooms on the basic skills of listening and speaking, reading and writing, so that literature provides a resource for encouraging and developing communicative competence which, as Hirvela (1996) points out, is a major factor in literature's return to the language classroom (see 2.4 and the brief discussion here on Widdowson's work). Perhaps, after all, more teachers do use literature as a *linguistic resource* than the results in Table 10 and discussion above indicate (see too Hirvela's observations discussed in 4.1).

There are opportunities for teachers to work towards critical literacy but as with regular English teachers certain constraints emerge. Clearly there is a need, as indicated by McRae (see 2.4) for teachers to think outside the frame of the four basic language skills listed above and include "the fifth skill, thinking" (McRae, 1996, pp. 22-23). The results in this section offer little that is conclusive, raising more questions than answers. These are discussed in the following section together with a comparison with the constraints facing regular English teachers.

8.3.3 Constraints preventing the development of critical literacy in the ESOL context

A major constraint in the ESOL context and one that does not apply to the mainstream context lies in the paucity of teaching with literature in language classes. This may be because of a number of reasons, including the lack of opportunity within existing structures, or because, as with Gadd (see 2.5), teachers do not believe that the interpersonal issues that arise with a humanistic teaching philosophy are the territory of language classes. Obviously, a humanistic philosophy can be realised through texts other than literary ones; this is not under discussion here. What is significant is Jacobs' language instructor/educator

distinction raised earlier (see 2.5, footnote 8). A language educator would seize on the opportunities literature affords to work with at least some of the many aspects of critical literacy such as raising moral and ethical issues if we agree with Sheehan, and the need to critique the social/cultural underpinnings of literary *discourse*. The matter is not as simple as this, however; two further reasons for the lack of teaching with literature that emerge are the *time* factor, raised by several respondents and the fact as stated by one respondent that her

aim was to mainstream the girls gradually. (Average age 15 yrs.) Practical subjects first. I use school journal articles mostly because they are short and simple and contain vocabulary likely to be generally useful and/or useful for science, social studies etc.

This relates to curriculum requirements and also suggests that teachers are under pressure to prepare students for mainstreaming.

Ways to introduce critical literacy can still be found and some constraints be overcome, and the results do indicate that those ESOL teachers working with literature have made a start in the direction of critical literacy, as the focus on both personal interpretations in preference to text-based meanings (see 8.3.2 above), and commitment by some who focus on social and cultural differences, suggest.

A further constraint that emerged (one not indicated anywhere in the NZATE data), through the comments made by only one respondent, is important to raise because though only of slight significance here, it could suggest a tip-of-the-iceberg situation in language classes throughout New Zealand:

I use novels and short stories once a week in reading period. Students read book at home then in class read to teacher aides who focus on pronunciation and comprehension and setting, characterisation plot and personal response.

With ongoing cutbacks in Education, language classrooms in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions may have to rely increasingly on the voluntary

contributions of people who may or may not be trained teachers. The perception that anyone who speaks English can teach it is misguided and reflects a narrow view of what students need, despite the fact that one-to-one speaking practice might benefit students.

8.4 Are the constraints different for the two contexts?

In answer to this question and confirming the third thesis statement, yes the constraints are different for each context as seen through the foregoing, in particular those related to firstly, curriculum (where in the ESOL situation literature is not mandatory) and secondly the role of the teacher (which in the ESOL context again is not a readily resolvable issue). Further, the issues related to student factors did not appear as a constraint in the ESOL context although this is not to say that they do not exist. Despite these differences however, the constraints are not so very different. For example, although examinations do not appear to be an issue for ESOL teachers (refer also to Collie and Slater reference 2.4), preparing L2 students for mainstreaming brings its own pressures and restrictions. Also the constraints for those regular English teachers coping with heterogeneous classrooms, i.e. those with mainstreamed L2 students, is perhaps comparable to the ESOL classrooms where the teacher must cope with mixed language proficiency levels. The major constraint common to both groups is the limited knowledge of teachers in the area of response theories, hence the need for extended professional development so that at least outmoded teaching pedagogies, indicated by the tendency of both groups towards a *text as artefact* approach, can be abandoned, helped along by a fresh understanding of how texts work. Further, professional development which focuses on a reassessment of the function of personal-response, including its limitations as outlined in 3.3, will facilitate the development of a more holistic humanistic educational philosophy. Old habits die hard, but die they must, like Barthes' author, if critical literacy is to come about.

Chapter Nine

CONCLUSION

With certain qualifications, all three thesis statements are sufficiently confirmed as to support, with an added degree of urgency, the need to overcome the constraints inhibiting the development of critical literacy in both contexts of this study. Teaching with literature offers an excellent resource for teachers and is used widely in secondary schools and to some extent in the language classroom however, the major teaching approaches tend to be based on either *text as artefact* or *text as linguistic resource*. It is only in an approach that recognises the critical interplay between reader, text and context, that critical literacy can be made possible.

All reader-response theories offer valuable teaching strategies, but as this study shows teachers' practice tends to be reflective of a structuralist approach modified by a humanistic concern for the personal growth and emotional welfare of the student. Personal growth without cognitive development however, is only half a solution if the aim of teachers is to empower students, both emotionally and intellectually, to become autonomous, responsible and rational human beings. An understanding of *text as discourse*, and what the Social and Cultural reader-response theorists expose as the power inherent in language to construct apparent (or virtual) realities and a multiplicity of meanings, can achieve this. Some valuable strategies that embrace poststructuralist theories and indicate ways of encouraging the *active* reader are outlined in chapter 5, in particular those which focus on Luke's four levels of reading competence (see 5.2). Moreover, this chapter indicates that the professional body consisting largely of teacher educators whose articles have been reviewed here, are clearly intent on the development of teachers towards a more critical literacy. However, how to impart this knowledge to a wide teaching population and break down outmoded pedagogies so that theory becomes practice, has been the concern of this study. Resources need to be made

available (as with the Writing Project at the end of the 80s; see footnote 22, chapter 5) so that teachers can expand their already eclectic practice to include critical literacy.

In leaving behind the New Critics and the Leavisites, I want to stress that the pursuit of *truth*, and opportunities for the development of moral reasoning powers, are not abandoned. What is abandoned is a doctrinal approach and the belief that profound truths are inherent in *great* literary texts, which taken to heart, or rather committed to memory, will make us better people. In a reader-response/*text as discourse* approach, *truths* do emerge and, moreover, become the student's own after first being thoroughly explored, disputed and tested; in other words, developed in an atmosphere that recognises multiple *truths*, multiple views and multiple influences of every possible kind. Response theories are empowering; no *truth* is more strongly believed than that arrived at personally through a process of challenge and critical thinking.

Further to avoid confusion over labels, I need to clarify that a new emphasis and a new leap forward in thinking means that reader-response as a label is not entirely satisfactory, hence what appears to be its metamorphosis into *critical literacy* or *Critical Reader-response* as adopted by Brett Elizabeth Blake (1998). Nevertheless, in terms of teaching practice, what we understand as reader-response theories as outlined in chapters 3 and 4 have a pivotal role to play. Many teachers still need to make the transition which must inevitably lead to critical literacy and only in understanding the principles underlying reader-response theories will this be possible. Otherwise, once critical literacy becomes gospel, written definitively into a revised curriculum document, a whole generation of mainly older teachers will be grappling with concepts that only ever remain in theoretical obscurity.

As a final comment and as a caution to qualify the assumptions expressed above concerning the inevitability of critical literacy in the English curriculum, it is as well to take note of the strong political flavour of critical literacy (as indicated earlier in the study); political controversy could prove to be the biggest constraint of all. Jane Tompkins (1980) makes the point that the poststructuralists'

insistence that language is constitutive of reality rather than merely reflective of it suggests that contemporary critical theory has come to occupy a position very similar to, if not the same as, that of the Greek rhetoricians for whom mastery of language meant mastery of the state. (p. 226)⁴⁶

Text as discourse brings the literary theory wheel full circle back to the focus on the text itself as with the study of *text as artefact*. However, the reader continues to be important in the new arrangement of reader, text and context and in a more insistent way with a kind of *reader be warned* emphasis. The author, the text and the reader are all constructed by *discourses*. No word is innocent. No text exists in a vacuum. Literary texts as with all texts including informational ones are in fact discourses that must remain open to critical scrutiny; it is our job as teachers to ensure all students learn the skills necessary.

⁴⁶ Plato's exclusion of the poets from his Republic (in fear of their rhetorical skills), might possibly be paralleled by the gradual withdrawal of funding from education apparent in New Zealand today, and the prevalence of industrial models in education.

Appendices

Appendix A

NZATE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1 Circle the ideas in the following with which you are *familiar*:
- personal response comprehension questions active reader
 student's prior knowledge dominant readings multiple readings
 marginalised ideas passive reader deconstructing the text
- 2 Circle the ideas in the following which you *use* in your teaching practice:
- personal response comprehension questions active reader
 student's prior knowledge dominant readings multiple readings
 marginalised ideas passive reader deconstructing the text
- 3 Briefly explain your approach to teaching literature.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- 4 Are you familiar with other ways of teaching literature?
- Yes No
- Explain: _____
- 5 Have you attended any professional development courses specific to the teaching of literature within the last five years? (Please tick)
- Yes No
- If 'yes' go to question 6 If 'no' go to question 8
- 6 Briefly describe the nature of this training (e.g. venue, topic, course duration).

-
- 7 This training has changed my approach to teaching literature. (Please tick)
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Not Sure | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 8 Have you or your department purchased any resource texts based on reader-response theories in the last five years? (Please tick)
- | | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> | Not sure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|----------|--------------------------|
- 9 I use reader-response criticism in my teaching of literature. (Please tick)
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Not sure | Agree | Strongly Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 10 Briefly outline the way you use personal response in teaching literature.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- 11 Is your approach to teaching juniors any different from that used with senior students? (Explain briefly)
- _____
- _____
- 12 Is your approach to teaching ESOL¹ students any different from that used with English first language students? (Explain briefly)
- _____
- _____

¹ESOL: English to speakers of other languages

- 13 Do you give students notes on any of the following: (Please tick)
- Plot summaries Character, themes, other aspects
- Notes on author Standard exam answers
- Notes on genre Other (Please state) _____
- 14 'Students' in question 13 refer to (Please circle):
- seniors (SC and above) juniors both groups
- 15 How are these notes generally given? (Please tick)
- Black/whiteboard Handout material Other (Please state) _____
- 16 If you use handout material at what stage is it given out? (Please tick)
- Beginning a new text During text study
- Finishing text study Revision for exams
- 17 Handout material is essential to ensure students have access to the best ideas.
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly | Disagree | Not Sure | Agree | Strongly |
| Disagree | | | | Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 18 Rank in order of importance the following five factors that determine your choice of text for teaching with (A) seniors and (B) juniors. That is, place a 1 beside the factor you consider most important, a 2 beside the next most important and so forth, until you have ranked all five factors.
- | | A: rank | B: rank |
|--|---------|---------|
| | Seniors | Juniors |
| Established critical reputation | _____ | _____ |
| Student interest in subject matter | _____ | _____ |
| Teachability of literary conventions | _____ | _____ |
| Potential for moral engagement with text | _____ | _____ |
| Level of language | _____ | _____ |
- 19 Teaching literature in a way that *focuses* on personal interpretations of the text is inappropriate for ESOL students (Please tick)
- | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Strongly | Disagree | Not Sure | Agree | Strongly |
| Disagree | | | | Agree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

- Explain _____
- 20 Briefly outline any problems incurred teaching literature with mainstreamed ESOL students.
- _____
- _____

Background information

- 1 Are you currently teaching? Yes No
- 2 In which town/city do you teach? _____
- 3 How old are you? (Please tick) 20-30 31-40
41-50 51-60 61 plus
- 4 Gender? Female Male
- 5 How many years have you been teaching English? _____ years
- 6 Specify the number of English classes you teach per week at each of the following levels:
- | | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
| Form 3 | _____ | Form 6 (6FC) | _____ |
| Form 4 | _____ | Form 6 Non 6FC) | _____ |
| Form 5 (SC) | _____ | Form 7 (Bursary) | _____ |
| Form 5 (Non SC) | _____ | Form 7 (Non Bur.) | _____ |
- 7 State *as a percentage* the approximate number of ESOL students you teach at each level.
- | | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
| Form 3 | _____ | Form 6 (6FC) | _____ |
| Form 4 | _____ | Form 6 Non 6FC) | _____ |
| Form 5 (SC) | _____ | Form 7 (Bursary) | _____ |
| Form 5 (Non SC) | _____ | Form 7 (Non Bur.) | _____ |

Thankyou for your cooperation

Please return the completed questionnaires in the envelope provided.

Appendix B

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SURVEY

My name is Julie Brown. I have been an English teacher for twenty years and recently resigned my position to become a full-time Masterate student in the School of Language Studies, at Massey University. My research area concerns the teaching of literature and the purpose of this questionnaire is twofold. Firstly, to gain some insight into the influence of contemporary literary criticism on the current teaching of literature in secondary classrooms throughout New Zealand. Secondly, to gain some understanding of the effect the mainstreaming of ESOL students may be having on literature teaching practice. Dr Margaret Franken, a senior lecturer in the School of Language Studies, Second Language Teaching Dept. is my supervisor. We can be contacted as follows:

Julie Brown	Ph: ([REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED])
Dr Margaret Franken	Ph: (06) 350 4983 Ext.7403

You are under no obligation to partake in this survey, but should you be happy to oblige, your involvement in answering the questionnaire will require about twenty minutes or less of your time. Any time you are prepared to give to responding to any of the questions, will be very much appreciated. A summary of the research findings will be available on request, and the information gathered through this questionnaire will be written up in a paper to be published in English in Aotearoa. It is through NZATE that you have been invited to participate in this study.

There are no drawbacks or risks in participating. All information given to me from the questionnaires will remain confidential to the research and any publications resulting. Although you will initially provide the city/town where you are employed as a teacher, this will subsequently be coded to provide anonymity in any discussion of results. Please note that your name on the questionnaire is not a requirement.

Completed questionnaires are to be returned to Julie Brown, C/- School of Language Studies (SLT), Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North. Stamped, addressed envelope provided.

Appendix C

ESOL SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

(for teachers of English to speakers of other languages)

Background information

- 1 Are you currently teaching? Yes No
- 2 In which town/city do you teach? _____
- 3 How old are you? (please tick) 20-30 31-40 41-50
51-60 61 plus
- 4 Gender? Female Male

Teaching experience and qualifications

- 5 How many years have you been teaching ESOL? ___ Years
- 6 Type of learning institution where you teach _____
- 7 Please tick the following qualifications as they apply to you:
College of Education Diploma of teaching: primary secondary
University degrees: BA BSC MA Other _____
Post-graduate diploma related to ESOL (please state) _____
Other qualifications specific to ESOL (e.g. RSA Cert/Dip) _____
- 8 Are you a member of TESOLANZ? Yes No
- 9 Please describe the student group or groups you work with (average age; sex; general needs of students, i.e. academic or otherwise, LAC; mainstream; intensive language; level of proficiency i.e. beginners, elementary, intermediate etc):

Teaching with Literature

10 How much of your teaching time is spent working with literature:

	Little or none	Some times	About half time	More than half	Most or all
Novels	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Short stories	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Poetry	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Other: please state _____	<input type="checkbox"/>				

11 Comment briefly on the nature of your literature resources (e.g. graded readers, school journals, local publications etc):

12 Briefly outline your approach to working with literature (e.g. focus on language, ideas/themes, characters, social & cultural context etc):

13 Circle the ideas in the following with which you are *familiar*:

personal response comprehension questions active reader
 student's prior knowledge dominant readings multiple readings
 marginalised ideas passive reader deconstructing the text

14 Circle the ideas in the following which you *use* in your teaching practice:

personal response comprehension questions active reader
 student's prior knowledge dominant readings multiple
 readings marginalised ideas deconstructing the text

15 Please indicate (tick) along the following continuum where your focus in literature teaching lies:

Interpretation based on Students' response/
 close reading of text interpretation of text



Appendix D

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SURVEY

My name is Julie Brown. I have been an English teacher for twenty years and recently resigned my position to become a full-time Masterate student in the School of Language Studies, at Massey University. My research area concerns the teaching of literature and the purpose of this questionnaire is to gain some insight into the current status of literature teaching practice in ESOL classrooms throughout New Zealand. Dr Margaret Franken, a senior lecturer in the School of Language Studies, Second Language Teaching Dept. is my supervisor. We can be contacted as follows:

Julie Brown Ph: (■■■■■■■■■■) (evenings). Dr M Franken Ph: (06) 350 498 Ext. 7403

You are under no obligation to partake in this survey, but should you be happy to oblige, your involvement in answering the questionnaire will require about ten minutes or less of your time. Any time you are prepared to give to responding to any of the questions, will be very much appreciated. A summary of the research findings will be available on request.

There are no drawbacks or risks in participating. All information given to me from the questionnaires will remain confidential to the research and any publications resulting. Although you will initially provide the city/town where you are employed as a teacher, this will subsequently be coded to provide anonymity in any discussion of results. Please note that your name on the questionnaire is not a requirement.

Completed questionnaires are to be returned to Julie Brown, C/- School of Language Studies (SLT), Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North.

*Appendix E***Table E 1. Percentage of teachers and the essential use of handout material to ensure access to best ideas**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
8	38	21	22	11	100

Appendix F

Table F 1. Percentage of teachers and a breakdown of professional development training

Unspecified NZATE conference courses	19
NZQA unit standards/Assessment	22
Literature as genre and/or to specified level	18
Regional association courses/workshops	12
Film and visual language	11
College of Education Courses	5
University Study	5
<i>How</i> to teach literature	4
Miscellaneous	4
Total	100

Appendix G

Table G 1. Percentage in each genre by learning institution

Institution and number of teachers (Total = 67)	Novel and children's fiction	Short stories	Poetry	Other e.g. big books, journals	Percentage Totals
Primary 4	13	29	29	29	100
Private 10	25	50	25	-	100
Secondary 27	29	40	25	6	100
Tertiary 26	21	42	33	4	100

Note: These percentages have been based on an aggregate of responses for each institution as set out below:

Table G 2. Frequency of responses in each genre

Institution and number of teachers	Novel and children's fiction	Short stories	Poetry	Other e.g. big books, journals	Aggregate of responses
Primary 4	1	2	2	2	7
Private 10	2	4	2	-	8
Secondary 27	14	19	12	3	48
Tertiary 26	5	10	8	1	24

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