
ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF DEWEY'S EPISTEMOLOGY ON ROSENBLATT'S READER RESPONSE THEORY

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In the past two decades, literary theory has undergone dramatic changes due in large part to the emergence of reader response theory.¹ Reader response theory originates from the pioneering work in the 1930s of literary theorist and English educator Louise Rosenblatt. Rosenblatt's theory is of interest to philosophers of education because it draws heavily on epistemological constructs from pragmatic philosophy.² Reader response theory is significant because it raises questions about the relative importance of the text *and* the reader in the formation of meaning, challenging the much revered tradition in literary theory of privileging text over reader. The purpose of this paper is to examine in detail the links between philosopher John Dewey's epistemology and Rosenblatt's reader response theory, and then to evaluate some of the educational implications of Rosenblatt's work.

Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading stresses the interconnectedness of reader and text in the process of constructing meaning.³ The term "transaction," adopted from Dewey's epistemological writings, implies that the "self" of the reader and the text are more flexible, taking on their character during the process of reading.⁴ Reader response theory locates meaning construction in the personal lived-through quality of a literary experience, *making the relationship between the text and the reader central*.

1. Jane Tompkins ed., *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980); Deanne Bogdan and Stanley Straw, *Beyond Communication: Reading Comprehension and Criticism* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1990); Edmund Farrell and James Squire, eds., *Transactions with Literature: A Fifty Year Perspective* (Urbana: National Council for Teachers of English, 1990); John Clifford, ed., *The Experience of Reading: Louise Rosenblatt and Reader-Response Theory* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991); and John Willinsky, *The Triumph of Literature/The Fate of Literacy: English in the Secondary School Curriculum* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991).

2. Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration* (1938; reprint, New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1983) and Louise Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: A Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978). This book will be referred to as RTP with page numbers in the text for all subsequent citations. For additional discussion of Peirce, James, and Dewey see Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*: Louise Rosenblatt, "The Aesthetic Transaction," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 20, no. 4 (1986), 122-23; and Louise Rosenblatt, "The Transactional Theory: Against Dualisms," *College English* 55, no. 4 (1993), 381-82.

3. Of course, at an even more general level the reader and the text are co-constructed and come out of the transactional process rather than being taken as given. I thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting the co-construction of subject and object in the writings of Dewey, and I have applied this concept to the works of Rosenblatt.

4. Louise Rosenblatt, "Literary Theory" in James Flood, Julie M. Jensen, Diane Lapp, and James Squire, eds., *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 59.

Rosenblatt's emphasis on the transactional relationship between reader and text draws upon Dewey's epistemological position that both knower and known constitute, and are constituted by, the process of inquiry.⁵ Dewey argues against any view of experience that denies its transactional character, that completely separates mind from body, subject from object, and self from world. Raymond Boisvert summarizes the importance of Dewey's position:

Subject and object, terms inherited from epistemology-centered philosophy, were no longer to be understood in the traditional manner. Instead of a subject as spectator examining the realm of objects, there is now the biological environment which involved participation of organisms in their surroundings. The environment or situation provided the dynamic unity of interacting entities.⁶

A transactional perspective serves to illuminate the interconnectedness of knower and known in a way that undermines modernist epistemological claims of detachment, certainty, and universality. Dewey's epistemology emphasizes the process of coming-to-know, the tentativeness of all knowledge claims, the active role of the knower, and the need for communication and agreement among inquirers.

Drawing on these epistemological constructs, Rosenblatt develops a theory of reading that highlights how the reader's aesthetic experience with a text contributes to the formation of meaning. In fact, Rosenblatt's theory of reading is arguably a successful response to Dewey's call for an educational theory to be built upon a permanent frame of reference to the organic nature of experience.⁷ By stressing primacy of experiences in literature classes Rosenblatt hopes to restore the aesthetic value of literature as well as to enhance its instrumental value in achieving broad educational aims. Rosenblatt predicts that a more reader response-oriented approach produces readers capable of evoking literary works for themselves and of deriving pleasures and insights claimed for literary study.⁸ Consideration of a reader's role in the construction of meaning enriches literary theory and influences how literature is taught in schools by making a reader's response an integral part of the literature class.⁹ Increased recognition among literary theorists and educators of Rosenblatt's

5. John Dewey and Arthur Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (1949; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1960). Rosenblatt's formulation of a "transactional" theory of reading solidified after she read Dewey and Bentley's account of transaction in *Knowing and the Known* (One of Rosenblatt's first systematic uses of the term transaction occurs in her article "Toward a Transactional Theory of Reading," *Journal of Reading Behavior* 1, no. 1 (1969): 31-49. This article was then followed by her major theoretical work *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: A Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*. In his correspondence to Dewey in 1950, Bentley writes that "Sidney Ratner wrote a little while back [that]... Louise Rosenblatt, his wife [professor] at New York University [(and teacher) of literary criticism], was all excited about application of *Knowing and the Known* to literature." (Sidney Ratner and Jules Altman, eds., *John Dewey and Arthur R. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence 1932-1951* [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1964], 630.

6. Raymond Boisvert, *Dewey's Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1988), 23.

7. John Dewey, *Education and Experience* (1938; reprint, New York: MacMillan, 1963), 25.

8. Rosenblatt, "Literary Theory," 61.

9. Alan Purves and Richard Beach, *Literature and the Reader: Research on Response to Literature, Reading Interests, and the Teaching of Literature* (Urbana: NCTE, 1972) and Richard Beach and James Marshall, *Teaching Literature in the Secondary School* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1990).

works indicates that she has accomplished, at least to some degree, her long-term aim of contributing "something constructive — a philosophical or theoretical foundation for revising the teaching of literature."¹⁰ Numerous scholars judge her work to be significant. For example, John Willinsky argues that Rosenblatt is one of four key theorists influencing how literature is taught in secondary schools today.¹¹ Moreover, Squire places Rosenblatt's transactional perspective among the ten great ideas in the teaching of English.¹²

One of the major contributions of Rosenblatt's reader response theory is its focus on the *experience* of a reader with a text, drawing attention to how a reader's belief system is constituted by, and constitutes, reading. This shift to an organic, experientially-based theory of reading suggests significant changes in the goals and methods in the classroom. A classroom that uses reader response theory is a much more complex learning environment than text-oriented classrooms. By encouraging students to take an active role in constructing meaning, Rosenblatt's reader response theory suggests that each experience with a text, and with other readers, brings a host of new potential responses and new meanings as well.

Thus, Rosenblatt's reader response theory serves to enrich the reader/text debate by locating meaning in the generative or "transactional" relationship between reader and text. The current debate over the location of "meaning" covers a broad spectrum of reader/text theories. At the ends of this spectrum, theorists emphasize either reader or text as the primary source of meaning. At the text end of the spectrum, theorists emphasize that meaning is contained within a text, viewing the role of the reader as passive. The reader is relegated to discovering or locating meaning totally inherent in the text. At the reader end of the debate, stand those who argue that meaning is completely subjective. In this case, the text is simply a means to self-disclosure and self-development. In the middle range of the spectrum resides reader response theory, where both reader and text are central players. In the past three decades, a wide variety of response-based theories have developed, including not only Rosenblatt's reader response theory, but also response theories influenced by poststructuralism, feminism, psychoanalysis, and neo-Marxism. Rosenblatt's transactional perspective, however, represents a powerful force among the many response theories now competing to influence both the direction of literary theory and the way that literature is taught in schools.

While Rosenblatt achieves her primary aim of bringing the reader into the reading process, her transactional perspective raises a number of questions. This paper explores two problem areas: the treatment of individual/social connections; and the reconstruction of what is meant by interpretation. By foregrounding a

10. Louise Rosenblatt, "Retrospective," in *Transactions with Literature*, ed. Edmund Farrell and James Squire (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1990), 100.

11. Willinsky, *The Triumph of Literature*, chaps. 1 and 5.

12. James Squire, "The Ten Great Ideas in the Teaching of English in the Past Half Century" in *Teacher as Learner*, ed. Merron Chorny (Calgary, Alberta: Language in the Classroom Project, 1985), 9-18.

reader's personal aesthetic experiences, Rosenblatt's theory provides only cursory consideration of how the larger social context shapes meaning. Rosenblatt readily acknowledges that social and cultural contexts contribute to individual consciousness and to meaning construction. But in an effort to avoid any type of deterministic tendencies common to theories that take social, linguistic, and cultural forces into account, Rosenblatt provides little insight into how these contextual forces transact with personal aesthetic experiences.

A second area of concern addressed in this paper emerges as Rosenblatt reconstructs what is meant by "interpretation." In applying the transactional theory of reading, Rosenblatt faces difficulty redefining what constitutes a valid reading of the text. In articulating criteria for judging a valid interpretation that serves as a guide for teachers, Rosenblatt struggles with defining how much latitude the reader/text transaction permits, since a transactional perspective supports a view that texts can be validly read in a number of ways.

While there have been numerous articles and books examining Rosenblatt's formulation of a transactional theory of reading, little attention has been given to exploring in detail the link between her transactional theory of reading and the concept of transaction found within Dewey's pragmatic epistemology. Before detailing the Dewey/Rosenblatt connection, this paper examines the social, intellectual, and historical context that shaped Rosenblatt's work. This historical background is necessary in order to understand more fully the subsequent analysis of Rosenblatt's reader response theory.

ROSENBLATT'S INTELLECTUAL ROOTS

Rosenblatt was born in 1904 in Atlantic City, New Jersey into a family that she characterizes as progressive. She was influenced intellectually by anti-authoritarian European sources and by American writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.¹³ While it is of course difficult to pinpoint precisely the roots of any idea, Rosenblatt lists a number of diverse sources influencing her philosophical base, including her work in the 1920s with anthropologists Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, her doctoral research in comparative literary theory, her experiences teaching college English, and her reading in the 1920s and 1930s of prominent pragmatists, especially Charles S. Peirce, William James, and Dewey (*RTP*, p. xi).¹⁴ Rosenblatt's understanding of Dewey's epistemology was not only cultivated by her familiarity with Dewey's major philosophical works, particularly *Human Nature and Conduct*, *Experience and Nature*, *Art as Experience*, and *Knowing and the Known*, but she also had some

13. Rosenblatt mentions Petr Kropotkin, see *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (Boston: Extending Horizon Books, 1902). See also Rosenblatt, "Retrospective," 97. For discussion of Emerson's influence on pragmatic philosophy see Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

14. As a participant in an experimental honors program at Barnard College (1921-1925) she read widely in English and American literature as well as in the new social sciences, particularly psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Rosenblatt began her academic career in 1929 as an instructor and then professor of English at Barnard College. She worked at Brooklyn College for ten years beginning in 1938, and then spent twenty-four years as a professor of English education at New York University.

personal contact with Dewey.¹⁵ She attended biennial meetings in the 1930s of the Conference on Method in Philosophy and the Sciences, where Dewey was also a participant.¹⁶

Rosenblatt's concern for the role of the reader in the reading process begins with her work in literary theory in the 1930s. While teaching at Barnard College, Rosenblatt was appointed to the Commission on Human Relations, a project funded by the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation and administered through the Progressive Education Association. This appointment gave Rosenblatt the opportunity to meet with numerous educators and to visit a number of innovative progressive schools.¹⁷

After completing her appointment as Commission advisor for a set of books for students, Rosenblatt produced an additional work of her own, *Literature as Exploration*.¹⁸ This work stresses the contribution of literature to a democratic society and the role of the reader in the reading process, as well as reflects an optimism about the future held by many progressive educators of this time period, especially in light of advances in natural and social sciences. Rosenblatt's own interdisciplinary training leads her to more readily envision a productive alliance between science and the arts. She anticipates that knowledge from natural and social sciences will translate into educational gains by improving curriculum theory and pedagogy. A more scientifically-based educational system will not only influence how literature will be taught in schools, but also will create an opportunity for literature to take on a new role as an instrument for democracy.¹⁹

In her early work, Rosenblatt makes explicit the broad social role of literature. In order to perform its social role as an instrument for a more democratic society, Rosenblatt argues that literature needs to become more reader based and that literature should appeal more to students' interests, which are served by introducing more contemporary and diverse works (such as minority and women authors) into the school curriculum. The special appeal of literature is an embodiment of human personalities, human situations, human conflicts and achievements that stimulates

15. There is also a connection to Dewey's works through Rosenblatt's husband, Sidney Ratner. Ratner, known primarily as an economic historian and secondarily for his work in political science, co-authored the 1950 *Dial* article "John Dewey, Philosopher of Science and Freedom," edited *John Dewey and Arthur F. Bentley: A Philosophical Correspondence*, and recently published two articles on Dewey's influence in math education, see "John Dewey's Empiricism, and Experimentalism in the Recent Philosophy of Mathematics," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53, no. 3 (1992): 476-81; "John Dewey, E.H. Moore, and Philosophy of Mathematics Education in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Mathematical Behavior* 11, (1992): 105-16.

16. Personal correspondence from Rosenblatt, 12 April 1993.

17. Rosenblatt, "Retrospective," 101, reports that following her involvement with the Commission on Human Relations, she became involved in the two major national organizations concerned with the teaching of literature, Modern Language Association (MLA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). NCTE became the primary organization to which she devoted her energies over the next half-century. As a professor of teachers of English, her contact with graduate students for more than two decades, and her active membership in NCTE, each provided Rosenblatt with an audience for her ideas.

18. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*.

19. Willinsky, *The Triumph of Literature*, 120.

both a personal response and communicates, to some degree, the experiences of others.²⁰ Thus, *literature plays both an aesthetic role by emphasizing personal response, and an instrumental role by bringing readers the experience of others.*

OPPOSITION TO NEW CRITICISM

In the 1930s Rosenblatt emphasizes a reader's aesthetic response to literature in opposition to a text-based literary theory known as New Criticism.²¹ While Rosenblatt and New Critics share a common interest in restoring literature as art, they differ significantly on how to achieve this goal.²² New Criticism redefined literature as art by turning exclusively to the text. Meaning was found through an impersonal analysis of the literary work as an autonomous entity that can be analyzed objectively.²³

From the 1930s to the late 1960s, New Criticism dominated literary theory. Rosenblatt's theory, with emphasis on a reader's contribution to meaning, was largely overshadowed by a broad range of theories concerned only with the text.²⁴ Some contend that part of the neglect of Rosenblatt's work was due not only to her unique positioning of the reader and her use of American rather than Continental philosophy, but also from her status as a woman in a male dominated field.²⁵

The acceptance of text-based theories was due, in some degree, to its assimilation of various ideas of positivist philosophy. Critics considered themselves adherents of scientific method, who objectively evaluated the structure of a text or poem in order to locate a determinate meaning within that structure. This text-based approach therefore privileges the expertise of those critics. Additionally, W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley's idea of "affective fallacy" further discredited the notion of assessing the quality of a poem based upon a reader's emotional response. The privileging of text over reader suggests that standards are concrete and objective rather than subjective and relativistic.

20. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, vii.

21. Cleanth Brooks and Penn Warren, eds., *Understanding Poetry* (New York: Henry Holt, 1938); Rene Welleck and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949); W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy," in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1946; reprint, Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1954); and E.D. Hirsch, *The Validity of Interpretation* (1967; reprint, New London: Yale University Press, 1973).

22. The idea of literature as art was not a typical concern among nineteenth century literary theorists, who focused on literary history, author's biography, contemporary social history, and the inspirational or ethical "message" of the text.

23. Rosenblatt, "Retrospective," 102.

24. The most influential nineteenth and twentieth century literary theorists were Matthew Arnold, F.R. Leavis, and Northrup Frye. These theorists turn their attention to the text as the source of meaning, albeit in very different ways. Alan Purves characterizes the primary aim of these text-based theorists as follows: "Arnold espouses an approach to literature that leads to the disinterested critic who judges all by the 'classical ideal'; Leavis wants students to learn the great tradition of moral literature and the use of literature in society; and Frye has readers learn the great myths and structural themes that make literature what it is." Alan Purves, "Toward a Reevaluation of Reader Response and School Literature," *Language Arts* 70 (1993): 355.

25. Willinsky, *The Triumph of Literature*. 138.

In the past three decades, New Criticism has been challenged effectively by a wide range of theoretical positions, including poststructuralism, literary theories (influenced by feminism, psychoanalysis, and neo-Marxism), and particularly Rosenblatt's transactionalism.²⁶ The diversity of these more response-based literary theories, as well as the changes in scientific views on knowledge, has served not only to expand the debate on the relative importance of the text and the reader in the formation of meaning, but also to create competing reader response theories that are either more reader- or more text-oriented than Rosenblatt's transactional perspective.

As a response to this debate among reader response theorists, Rosenblatt distinguishes her transactional perspective by emphasizing the reader-plus-text component. Of particular concern to Rosenblatt are reader-based theories that neglect the special, transactional role of the text during the reading process.²⁷ Due to the pendulum swing from the emphasis on the text in the 1930s to an emphasis on the reader in the 1980s, Rosenblatt's advocacy of a balanced approach has required her to shift her emphasis over time. Ironically, instead of having to argue for inclusion of the reader, as she did with New Criticism in the 1930s, *Rosenblatt now finds herself defending the importance of the text as a crucial part of the process of meaning construction*. In her effort to preserve a role for the text, Rosenblatt, at times, now uses quite similar text-based language that she had rejected earlier from other theorists. While Rosenblatt's emphasis has changed from the 1930s to the present, her objective has remained consistent. Her lifelong aim has been and continues to be to create a reading theory that avoids charges of subjectivism and relativism, and that finds a way to balance the role of reader and text in meaning construction.

THE DEWEY/ROSENBLATT CONNECTION: TRANSACTION AND ITS EPISTEMOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The transactional relationship between knower and known described by Dewey in his epistemological writings serves as one of the central philosophical reference points for Rosenblatt's unique positioning of the relationship between reader and text (*RTP*, p. 17). Dewey stresses that knowers and knowns should not be viewed dualistically as isolated elements, but rather as transactionally related (namely, integrated and coordinated activities where thoughts, actions, and feelings transact within a context of ongoing behavior and within a particular matrix of experience).²⁸ The primary implication of a transactional perspective is that humans are inextricably woven into the social and natural fabric of the world.

26. Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism*; Bogdan and Straw, *Beyond Communication*; Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); Judith Fetterly, *The Resistant Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); Mark Faust, "Ways of Reading and the Use of Force" (*English Journal* 81 (1992): 44-49; Annette Kolodny, "A Map for Rereading: Or Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," *New Literary History* 11, no. 3 (1980): 451-67; Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

27. Rosenblatt, "Literary Theory," 59.

28. Flower and Murphey, *A History of Philosophy in America: Volume 2* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1977), 830.

Dewey's account of an experientially-based, organic and generative relationship between subject and object attempts to escape any connotation of *separate* realms of being between subject and object.²⁹ From a Deweyan perspective, the process of constructing meaning and making sense of the world starts with the relational character of subject/object or knower/known. The concepts of dynamic interaction and thought as activity, first articulated in Dewey's reflex arc article become the basis for Dewey's later notion of transaction.³⁰ While Dewey begins in the 1930s to use the term "transaction" more systematically, transaction became a central concept in *Knowing and the Known*. Dewey and Arthur Bentley argue that:

What has been completely divided in philosophical discourse into man *and* world, inner *and* outer, self *and* not-self, subject *and* object, individual *and* social, private *and* public, etc. are in actuality parties in life-transactions....in our general [pragmatic] procedure of inquiry no radical separation is made between that which is observed and the observer in the way which is common in the epistemologies.³¹

Rather than isolating subject and object, Dewey's concept of transaction foregrounds an organic and generative relationship between knower and known.

In keeping with Dewey's pragmatic epistemology, Rosenblatt also rejects a dualistic view of reader and text by eliminating a subject/object dichotomy: a "sharp demarcation between objective and subjective becomes irrelevant, since they are, rather, aspects of the same transaction — a reader looks to the text, and the text is activated by the reader" (*RTP*, p. 18). In the act of reading, both reader and text are modified, each in a sense are different by virtue of the relationship (*RTP*, p. 43). Her transactional view parallels Dewey and Bentley's description of the transactional relationship of subject and object during inquiry. Rosenblatt argues that the result of a transactional literary theory is that "the 'self' of the reader and the text are conceived as more flexible, taking on their character during the transaction, which is an event conditioned also by its particular convention."³²

One primary feature associated with the separation of subject and object that Dewey wants to avoid is a passive role for the knower. Modern epistemology commits what Dewey regards as the "great intellectualistic fallacy" by building upon a spectator view of knowledge, where knowledge is isolated from its context of "origin and function," and where only experience which is "inherently cognitive" is valued in a way that disparages everyday qualitative experience (practical, esthetic,

29. Philosopher Richard Bernstein characterizes the significance of Dewey's use of the term transaction as providing "a more rigorous formulation of the category of the organic." Richard Bernstein, ed., "Introduction," *On Experience, Nature, and Freedom* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), x.

30. Dewey argues that the stimulus/response arc imported in the late nineteenth century from physiology to psychology and philosophy fails its intended purpose to provide a more unified and dynamic account of behavior than was possible under associationism and theories influenced by a mind/body dualism. Instead, Dewey points out that by partitioning experience into a separate stimulus and response, the reflex arc model preserves the same hard distinctions it had been designed to replace, and provides no understanding of thought-guided action, planning behavior, and learning; Flower and Murphey, *A History of Philosophy in America*, 829-30.

31. Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, 276, 103-4.

32. Rosenblatt "Literary Theory," 60.

moral).³³ Dewey's main objective is to discredit myths that physical things stamp themselves upon the mind through sense organs.³⁴

Rosenblatt also emphasizes the active role of the reader by drawing attention to the full range of ideas and feelings being evoked and organized as a reader transacts with a text:

At the aesthetic end of the spectrum, in contrast [to a non-aesthetic stance], the reader's primary purpose is fulfilled *during* the reading event, as he [the reader] fixes his attention on the actual experience he is living through. This permits the whole range of response generated by the text to enter into the center of awareness, and out of these materials he selects and weaves what he sees as the literary work of art (*RTP*, pp. 27-28).

Construction of meaning occurs as the reader selects and reflects on his/her responses. Rosenblatt credits Dewey's work on the reflex arc in undermining a simple stimulus-response model that ignores the way human beings dynamically transact with the enviroing conditions, changing themselves and the conditions simultaneously. As Rosenblatt notes, "what the organism selects out and seeks to organize according to already acquired habits, assumptions, and expectations becomes the environment to which it also responds" (*RTP*, p. 17).

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF EXPERIENCE

Both Dewey and Rosenblatt make experience central to their epistemological positions. Dewey's rich view of experience parallels Rosenblatt's treatment of reading as experience. Rosenblatt argues convincingly that literary experience differs in degree, but not in kind, from action-oriented experience.

Dewey highlights two views of experience that contribute to shaping the character of a transactional relationship between knower and known. First, experience encompasses a broad definition that is associated with a biological view, where experience describes all interactions of living beings with their social and natural environment. And second, Dewey advances experience as method.³⁵ Dewey stresses that "experience...is full of inference...there is no conscious experience without inference: reflection is native and constant."³⁶ Experience as method involves change, but change is a "meaningless transition unless it is consciously connected with the return wave of consequences which flow from it."³⁷

The advantage of the broad definition of immediate experiences, Dewey argues, comes with its added complexity. Experiences contain many potentialities: "For in

33. For recent critical assessment of Dewey's spectator theory of knowledge, see Christopher Kulp, *The End of Epistemology: Dewey and His Allies on the Spectator Theory of Knowledge* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992). See also John Dewey, *Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1929), 219.

34. John Dewey, 1922, "Human Nature and Conduct," in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899-1924*, vol. 14, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (1922; reprint, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 176-77.

35. John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (1925; reprint, LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Publishing, 1985), 2; John Dewey, "On the Need for Recovery of Philosophy," in John Dewey, *On Experience, Nature, and Freedom* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1960), 26.

36. Dewey, "On the Need for Recovery of Philosophy," 23.

37. Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1916), 139.

any object of primary experience there are always potentialities which are not explicit; any object that is overt is charged with consequences that are hidden; the most overt act has factors which are not explicit."³⁸ The fulfillment then of one potentiality over another results in part from physical conditions that develop, but also partly from the human element in transactional relationships with these environing conditions. Dewey's argument that multiple potentialities create openings for individuals to construct different meanings of a situation becomes a fundamental premise in Rosenblatt's theory of reading.

Rosenblatt concurs with Dewey's position that the generic trait of existence is a transaction between the organism and the world and she extends this condition to reading: "The reading act is simply an exemplification, with highly rarified complications, of the basic transactional character of all human activity and especially linguistic activity" (*RTP*, p. 20). Rosenblatt draws upon a Deweyan definition of experience with its connection to immediacy, its association with multiple potentialities, and its suggestion of the uniqueness of personal response. A Deweyan sense of lived-through experience is clearly evident when Rosenblatt stresses the individual's "immediately experienced qualitative aspects" that involve the "mind and emotions of a particular reader" (*RTP*, pp. 37, xii).

With a view of the immediacy of this kind of experience, Rosenblatt captures an intensely personal side of literary experience:

The reader's main purpose is to participate as fully as possible in the potentialities of the text. But much of the interest and vitality and texture of the total literary experience arises from the intensely personal activity of thought and feeling with which the literary transaction is impregnated and surrounded (*RTP*, p. 69).

Prior habits, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs facilitate a reader's unique experience with the text and contribute to the construction of meaning.

Rosenblatt's concept of the immediate quality of experience connects with the idea that perception is an active capacity. Rosenblatt refers to an unconscious or unmediated process that a reader undergoes, "he [the reader] is not aware of the individual responses or of much of the process of selection and synthesis that goes on as his eyes scan the page" (*RTP*, p. 52). Moreover, Rosenblatt makes clear that reading is an active experience and not a vicarious experience of a spectator:

We are living in the world of the work, which we have created under guidance of the text, and are entering new potentialities of our own natures....it is a unique mode of experience, an expansion of boundaries of our own temperaments and worlds, lived through in our own persons (*RTP*, p. 68).

Rosenblatt recognizes that a literary experience is different in some degree from actions without verbal mediation, nevertheless she argues that reading is still a form of "experience."

The aesthetic stance brings with it a certain distancing from "reality," because it is known that experience is generated by words and not by such images, situations, characters, actions observed directly without verbal mediation. The attention is consciously focused on what the words are stirring up (*RTP*, p. 31).

38. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 21.

A response to a text is an experience, though arguably different from an action-oriented experience.

The second view of experience that Dewey advances is experience as method.³⁹ The concept of mediated or reflective experience reveals the need for choice and judgment during the process of reflection, and reminds us of the crucial role played by humans as active agents in selecting what part of the experience or the problem to address, and how to pursue a possible solution. The constructed element, embedded in Dewey's discussion of immediate experience where habits play a role in actively shaping perception, comes openly to the fore in experiences shaped by reflection.⁴⁰ Dewey submits that: "Under all the captions that are called immediate knowledge, or self-sufficient certitude of belief, whether logical, aesthetic or epistemological, there is something selected for a purpose."⁴¹ The history of knowledge would have been quite different, Dewey argues, if the word "taken" were used instead of "data" or "givens."⁴² Dewey distinguishes between immediate experiences and reflective experiences, where data are selected and give impetus to knowing. The main point Dewey stresses here is during reflective experiences selection affects all observation, performing more like a filter than a magnifying glass.⁴³

Dewey contends that to learn from experiences means to "make a backward and forward connection between what we do to things and what we enjoy or suffer from things in consequence."⁴⁴ The measure of the value of an experience and its meaning lies in the perception of relationships or of continuities connected to the consequences of acting upon a belief. Methods of reconstructing experience, according to Dewey, should emulate the general methods of science and be a public enterprise, where a community of inquirers agrees on the usefulness and value of the outcome of a particular inquiry. With an emphasis on inquiry the primary focus of Dewey's epistemology shifts from antecedent existence and encompassing theories of correspondence, to a future-oriented process of inquiry where human beings project consequences and construct what is known rather than discovering it.⁴⁵

Rosenblatt also emphasizes a view of experience as method with her attention to the reader's reflection on lived-through experiences with a text. The influence of past experiences on what a reader selects to attend to during the reflective process is a crucial factor:

39. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 2 and Dewey, "On the Need for Recovery of Philosophy," 26.

40. For a recent discussion of the constructed nature of Dewey's epistemology, see Jim Garrison, "Realism, Deweyan Pragmatism, and Educational Research," *Educational Researcher* 23, no. 1 (1994): 11.

41. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 29.

42. John Dewey, *Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1929), 178.

43. Dewey and Bentley, *Knowing and the Known*, 68.

44. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 140.

45. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 130.

Recognition of the individual consciousness mediating between symbol and referent is essential to an understanding of any reading and especially to the aesthetic reading.... the reader draws selectively on the resources of his own fund of experience and sensibility to provide and organize the substance of his response [RTP, p. 43].

In keeping with these two Deweyan views of experience, Rosenblatt embraces the concept of selectivity at both conscious and unconscious levels that frees "meaning" from its purely conceptual overtones and permits a view of meaning connected to experience. The activity of selection is critical because it sets the conditions for subsequent experiences and reflections during the reading process.

CONNECTING EXPERIENCE AND MEANING

Building upon an organic connection between knower and knowns, Dewey develops an epistemology that replaces abstract and objective notions like reason and logic with a more active, experimental process that also emphasizes communication and agreement among inquirers. For Dewey, "knowledge is communication as well as understanding.... a thing is fully known only when it is published, shared, and socially accessible."⁴⁶ Also central to Dewey's epistemology is a theory of inquiry that proceeds in an atmosphere in which inquirers pursue objects of knowledge that in principle retain their provisional character.⁴⁷

Dewey's concept of transaction, so central to understanding his theory of experience, also plays a major role in defining the relationship between knower and known during the process of inquiry.⁴⁸ Lisa Heldke connects Dewey's innovative theory of inquiry with the concept of transaction:

Neither the concept of creation nor that of discovery adequately captures the Deweyan notion of inquiry — for both these categories assume a subject/object relationship. But for Dewey, one's perspective as inquirer is not that of disinterested, removed, epistemologically privileged bystander, but of dynamic participant, engaged in reconstructing our understanding of, and relationships in, the world through our communication with and in it.⁴⁹

The inquirer plays an active role in constructing meaning. In Heldke's view, "Dewey concentrates on the ways inquirers do affect the course of nature, on the fact that the kinds of interconnections existing in the world do change as a result of our inquiry into them."⁵⁰ Thus, under these fluid conditions inquiry contains multiple possibilities in a way that undermines the notion that there is a single objectivity out there waiting to be discovered.

For Dewey, meaning is primarily a property of cooperative behavior "in that responses to another's act involves contemporaneous response to a thing as entering

46. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1927), 176.

47. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 130.

48. Sleeper finds the concept of transaction so central to Dewey's metaphysics that he calls Dewey's pragmatism a "radical form of realism — a transactional realism." Ralph Sleeper, *The Necessity of Pragmatism: John Dewey's Conception of Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 3.

49. Lisa Heldke, "John Dewey and Evelyn Fox Keller: A Shared Epistemological Tradition," *Hypatia* 2, no. 3 (1987): 136-37.

50. *Ibid.*, 140.

into the other's behavior, and this upon both sides."⁵¹ Thus, meanings connect to actions or experiences rather than to mere symbols, but the system of symbols and discourse are the means to intelligent behavior. Dewey positions both language and texts as modes of participation and ultimately in shared behaviors:

Language is similarly not a mere agency for economizing energy in the interaction of human beings. It is a release and amplification of energies that enter into it, conferring upon them added quality of meaning....They are more than mere occurrences; they have implications.⁵²

While Dewey acknowledges that meanings exist in language, he argues that language is not a static code. Rather, language is *a mode of interaction* that implies shared, cooperative exchanges through acquired habits of speech.⁵³ Dewey tends to emphasize the generative aspect of communication and meaning construction. Dewey argues that the "heart of language is not 'expression' of something antecedent...it is communication; the establishment of cooperation in an activity in which there are partners, and in which the activity of each is modified and regulated by partnership."⁵⁴ Thus for Dewey, *communication and agreement become central epistemological elements.*

The kind of relationship needed here for successful inquiry, however, is one where antagonisms, differences, and conflicts give way to the needs of a common pursuit. This relationship is more like a friendship, as when "two people 'correspond' in order to modify one's own ideas, intents, and acts."⁵⁵ With this friendly relationship setting the stage for cooperation rather than conflict, Dewey tends to dissolve the potential tension between personal and social by positing a bond between society and the individual that precludes a destructive relationship.⁵⁶ He urges that "liking, bias, [and] interest" need to express themselves in "responsible and informed ways."⁵⁷ Thus, there is no way to separate individual consciousness from social consciousness: "No individual develops in isolation, responses grow intelligent, or gain meaning, simply because he lives and acts in a medium of accepted meanings and values."⁵⁸

A question arises, however, about what is meant here by *accepted meanings and values*. While Dewey assumes that greater participation in inquiry will bring

51. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 149. For further discussion of Dewey's behavioral semantics, see Garrison, "Realism, Deweyan Pragmatism, and Educational Research," and Heldke, "John Dewey and Evelyn Fox Keller."

52. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 144. This quote was brought to my attention by Garrison, "Realism, Deweyan Pragmatism, and Educational Research."

53. *Ibid.*, 143-45.

54. *Ibid.*, 148.

55. *Ibid.*, 138. The idea of correspondence is developed extensively by Heldke.

56. As Kaplan correctly suggests, Dewey's description of value and the use of intelligence are localized in individuals; both ends and means of social action can be defined only by reference to individuals. Thus, Dewey ultimately gives more weight to individual interests than to class, state, nation, or an abstract humanity. Abraham Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1964), 43.

57. Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 348.

58. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 295.

agreement on meanings and values, there may be times when inquirers cannot agree based upon differences in power, conflicting obligations, and different readings of the problem at hand. Alfonso Damico, in his analysis of Dewey's political theory, demonstrates that Dewey underestimates issues of power, overlooks conflicting obligations created by different associations, and tends at times to represent problematic situations as objective conditions rather than as complex and conflicting social problems.⁵⁹

Another limitation of Dewey's epistemology, stems from his lack of analysis of the social conditions of the inquirer. While Dewey embraces epistemological constructs of experience, transaction, communication, and agreement that highlight the importance of contextualizing inquiry, he does not explore how particular human conditions further modify inquiry. If inquiry is a connecting activity, connecting inquirer and inquired in myriad ways, then the social position of the inquirer also plays an instrumental role in shaping inquiry.⁶⁰ Heldke persuasively suggests that the reason Dewey pays so little attention to the role that social conditions play in inquiry is due to his reliance on western history, where the social position of the inquirer has also been rendered invisible. "[Dewey] devotes relatively little attention to an examination of how [western] history was shaped by human conditions—economic, social, sexual, racial—nor does he use these conditions to construct his coresponsible position."⁶¹ Despite limited treatment of the social conditions of the inquirer, Heldke finds Dewey's theory of inquiry attractive because of its emphasis on a "coresponsible" position (that is, a position that evokes the communal aspect of inquiry in a way that entails obligations of respect and care).

While Dewey's epistemological position leaves a number of unanswered questions about the impact of social and political conditions on inquiry, its strength lies in its embrace of human beings as "complicated entities enmeshed in a complex environment, both natural and social, with which they interact in multiple ways."⁶² With added elements of communication and agreement, Dewey's epistemology provides a rich model for constructing a theory of reading that highlights the generative relationship between reader and text.

ROSENBLATT'S THEORY OF READING

While Dewey's educational writings provide little in terms of directly addressing reading or literary experience, he views texts as an important part of the environing conditions that make up a learning situation:

An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time constitutes his environment...[including] the book he is reading (in which his environing conditions could be England or ancient Greece)...interact with personal needs, desires, purposes, and capacities to create the experience which is had.⁶³

59. Alfonso Damico, *Individuality and Community: The Social and Political Thought of John Dewey* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978), 57-61.

60. Heldke, "John Dewey and Evelyn Fox Keller," 140.

61. *Ibid.*, 139.

62. Boisvert, *Dewey's Metaphysics*, 180.

63. Dewey, *Education and Experience*, 43-44.

The text and other enviroing conditions in the classroom, such as opportunities for classroom observation, experimentation, communication, and ongoing associations, contribute to forming the situation.

The few remarks that Dewey makes about texts are mostly cautionary, based upon practices in traditional classrooms. He opposes any view of knowledge that is formalized and abstract, and thereby removed from experience. A formalized view of knowledge tends to use a book as an end in-and-of-itself. Dewey warns that words contained in books, which serve as signs for ideas, are too easily taken for ideas themselves. This type of abstraction is a kind of pseudo-idea, which lacks sufficient meaning to be useful. Dewey argues that our observations and ideas are keener and more extensive when connected to vital experience, which requires judgment and a search for connections.⁶⁴

Rosenblatt concurs with Dewey's critique of the formalized view of knowledge and develops her transactional theory of reading to counteract abstract tendencies. Primacy is placed on *experience, and its transactional character*. A reader experiences by envisioning characters, participating in their uttered thoughts and emotions, and weaving a sequence of events into a plot. Rosenblatt describes the relationship of the reader, the text, and the poem as more like a dialogue where a reader: (1) develops a tentative framework in response to the "cues" of the text; (2) forms expectations that influence selection and synthesis of further responses; (3) experiences either fulfillment or frustration of those expectations; (4) adjusts expectations further; and finally, (5) synthesizes some kind of meaning (*RTP*, p. 54).

A reader's engagement with the text, and a reader's subsequent responses to that text become the starting point of a literary experience and the construction of meaning. Rosenblatt submits that an aesthetic stance will lead a reader to reflect on personal responses to literature, which she characterizes as the "poem."

Sensing, feeling, imagining, thinking under the stimulus of the words, the reader who adopts the aesthetic attitude feels no compulsion other than to apprehend what goes on during this process, to concentrate on the complex structure of experience that he is shaping and that becomes for him the poem, the story, the play symbolized by the text (*RTP*, p. 26).

It is this aesthetic experience generated by a transactional relationship that constitutes literary work or the "poem," and is the object of response and interpretation.

Rosenblatt shuns a theory of language that stabilizes meanings of words without consideration of the reader.

The flexibility of individual words, the wide range of possible responses, might even seem in this way to be relatively delimited or stabilized within each individual text. This is indeed the basis of the extreme importance of the particular pattern of linguistic symbols which constitute the literary text. But, we know, not even the total text represents an absolute set of guides; multiple and equally valid possibilities are often inherent in the same text in its transactions with different readers under different conditions (*RTP*, p. 75).

But while Rosenblatt's transactional view preserves an active role for the reader, it provides few insights into the role language plays as the reader, the text, and the larger social context transact during the reading experience.

64. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 144.

Despite Rosenblatt's acknowledgment that language is a socially generated and socially generative phenomenon, the emphasis of her theoretical work is on how "language must be internalized by each individual human being, with all the special overtones that each unique person and unique situation entail" (*RTP*, p. 20). Clearly, part of Rosenblatt's reluctance to stress the embeddedness of the reader in the social context stems from a desire to escape deterministic tendencies. Just as her early writings challenged text-oriented reading theories, Rosenblatt now critiques the deterministic tendencies among poststructuralists, deconstructionists, and other ideologically-based theorists.

As the 80s advanced, all of the questions raised began to pale in comparison with manifestations of the individual/social dichotomy. Again, premises that I shared — the recognition that each individual absorbs the assumptions and values of the society or culture — became the basis for seeing the individual as completely dominated by society, the culture, or the "community."⁶⁵

Rosenblatt judges these theories inadequate because they deny the possibility of individual involvement in meaning construction. Poststructuralism and other ideologically-based theories attach "meaning making" to either larger discourse communities or to the relationships of power among members of these communities. Her aim is to avoid any notions of a generic reader advanced by New Criticism or a more current postmodern view of a reader "as caught in the prison house of language and culture," both of which undermine the active role of the reader.⁶⁶

The educational value of a text comes when a transactional relationship between reader and text creates a tension between the internal meanings of a reader and the external world in such a way that the boundaries between the two become more flexible. Rosenblatt identifies this situation as paradoxical:

The paradox is that he [the reader] must call forth from memory of his world what the visual or auditory stimuli symbolize for him, yet he feels the ensuing work as part of the world outside himself. The physical signs of the text enable him to reach through himself and the verbal symbols to something sensed as outside and beyond his own personal world. The boundary between inner and outer world breaks down, and the literary work of art, as so often remarked, leads us into a new world. It becomes part of the experience which we bring to our future encounters in literature and in life (*RTP*, p. 21).

Thus, the reading context enables a delicate balance between the reader and the text. A literary experience must both arouse a reader's sense of his/her personal world, and serve an educational function by drawing a reader beyond the personal. Thus, Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading fulfills the goals of the study of literature, by both restoring literature's aesthetic value focusing on the reader's aesthetic experience, and by serving an instrumental role bringing readers the experience of others.

In selecting texts for literature classes, Rosenblatt recommends texts that influence growth toward more democratic values, these texts would establish positive criteria for selecting among choices, whether coming from the dominant or a minority culture. She is severely critical of ideological-based and poststructural theories not only because they focus too extensively on social/linguistic/cultural

65. Rosenblatt, "The Transactional Theory," 385.

66. Rosenblatt, "Retrospective," 106.

factors in meaning construction, but also because they seem to promote negativistic preoccupation with social ills, alienation, and simplistic views of power.⁶⁷

QUESTIONS ABOUT INTERPRETATION

When Rosenblatt addresses the problem of integrating a transactional theory of reading into a classroom setting, she looks for ways to blend her transactional perspective with established purposes and traditions of literary study. A key issue in literary study is establishing criteria for what constitutes a valid reading of a text. Rosenblatt reminds us that interpretation of a literary work is an abstraction and that quality of a literary experience, from a transactional perspective, depends on the fullness and intensity of a reader's evocation. But in considering how to provide guidance to teachers in the classroom, Rosenblatt develops two general criteria for judging a valid interpretation: (a) a reader's interpretation cannot be contradicted by any element of the text, and, (b) nothing can be projected by a reader for which there is no verbal basis (*RTP*, p. 115). Based on these general criteria, the text can be validly read in several different voices as a transactional view would suggest. *Difficulty arises, however, in determining more specifically the degree of constraint for interpretation.* (*RTP*, p. 76, emphasis added).

In describing the degree of constraint for interpretation, Rosenblatt uses the text-oriented language that she rejects from other theorists. For example, Rosenblatt sounds more text-based when she suggests that: "Under the magnetism of ordered symbols of the text, he [the reader] marshals his resources and crystallizes out of the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience" (*RTP*, p. 12). Constraints on interpretation raise specific questions about the nature of the text and of the interpretive framework of a reader. Rosenblatt argues further that "the text itself leads the reader toward a self-corrective process."⁶⁸

Rosenblatt's cursory examination of a reader's social situation continues to be reflected in her discussion of criteria for judging a sound reading. Here, she argues that there are no absolute guidelines, but rather judgment of a sound reading is based on particular linguistic, semantic, and metaphysical factors appropriate to a particular time and place, and a particular set of criteria for an adequate reading (*RTP*, p. 129). Additionally, Rosenblatt also argues that agreed upon criteria might be subject to further modification by leaving,

open the possibility of equally valid alternative interpretations as well as of alternative criteria for validity of interpretation. Such an approach enables us to present a sophisticated understanding of the openness and the constraints of language to our students without abnegating the possibility of responsible readings of texts.⁶⁹

But how will alternative criteria be viewed in light of "responsible" readings? Responsible readings will be generated by community standards, but how will these community standards reflect difference, diversity, multiplicity and conflict?

67. Rosenblatt, "The Transactional Theory," 385.

68. Louise Rosenblatt, "The Poem as Event," *College English*, 26 (1964): 2, 125.

69. Rosenblatt, "The Transactional Theory," 382.

Rosenblatt's solution, following Dewey and many progressive educators, is to turn to democratic values, suggesting that these criteria could be drawn from values contained in both dominant and minority cultures. But there are many unanswered questions regarding how this agreement emerges, even within a democratic society. In an attempt to explain how a community comes to agree upon the most defensible criteria for what constitutes valid interpretations, Rosenblatt turns to Dewey's concept of warranted assertibility, where the community comes to agree through a process of inquiry.⁷⁰ By attaching meaning to particular events of inquiry and by stressing public exchange, Dewey uses warranted assertibility as a way to avoid the notion of arbitrary meaning. With this idea of public exchange, Dewey hopes for an emergent, experientially, democratically inspired, community-based objectivity that prevents inquiry from being based solely on subjective discoveries or based on the dominance of one single group. Dewey attempts to objectify belief and value by judging its capacity to endure publicity, and views open communication as the key for testing whether an idea is genuine or spurious.⁷¹ But as Damico and Heldke persuasively suggest above, despite Dewey's recognition of the importance of contextualizing inquiry, the concept of warranted assertibility does not fully account for how politics and particular human conditions might further modify inquiry.

CONCLUSIONS

The transactional relationship between knower and known described by Dewey in his epistemological writings, serves as one of the central philosophical reference points for Rosenblatt's original account of the relationship between reader and text. Rosenblatt, building upon Dewey's constructs develops a transactional theory of reading that enriches understanding of the reading process by: (a) elevating the status of the reader; (b) focusing on the personal nature of response; (c) associating response with lived-through experiences; (d) acknowledging the active role of perception in meaning construction; and (e) connecting the construction of meaning with communication.

Rosenblatt's primary contribution to literary theory is to draw attention to the active involvement of the reader, making "personal response the basis for growth toward a more and more balanced, self-critical, knowledgeable interpretation" of the text.⁷² As an English educator, Rosenblatt is concerned primarily with creating a more meaningful and fruitful relation between the arts and society. Her concern for the arts motivates her challenge to text-based literary theory and her interest in the education of readers of literature.⁷³ One of the major attractions of Rosenblatt's reader response theory is the idea that each reading situation contains multiple potentialities of meaning. A transactional perspective significantly changes the starting point of the search for meaning by rejecting any view of humans as separate from envioning conditions, as passive and purely rational beings. Instead, the focus

70. *Ibid.*

71. Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 205.

72. Rosenblatt, "Retrospective," 100.

73. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, chap. 2.

is on human involvement as habits and purposes that guide the formation of meaning.

A number of important educational implications can be drawn from Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literary work with its emphasis on the generative nature of the relationship between reader and text. Perhaps Rosenblatt's most important contribution to educational theory is to stress again to educators the importance of the idea of experience in the classroom. A transactional theory of reading reminds us that literature can serve as a source of experience by focusing on a reader's initial aesthetic response. This reading process highlights a reader's construction of meaning, instead of locating a determinate meaning within a text. Reader response theory also implies a more democratically structured classroom where readers learn from each other. A transactional perspective implies a developmental process where meaning changes as readers share their responses with others over time. Each experience with a text, and with other readers, brings a host of new responses and new meanings.

Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading challenges educators to evaluate epistemological assumptions underlying the text/reader debate as well as their instructional methods. A literary experience should not only arouse a reader's sense of his/her personal world, but also draw a reader beyond the personal in order to be educational. Rosenblatt's transactional perspective adds a critical dimension for assessing the reader's role in constructing meaning and suggests a need to reevaluate the broad aims and methods of literature programs in today's schools.