READER-ORIENTED THEORIES AND SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE IN THE CARIBBEAN[1]

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Reader-oriented methodologies offer promising alternatives to traditional approaches to literary education for Caribbean school systems reporting declining student interest in imaginative literature, and "formulaic" examination responses. By exploiting the "human meaningfulness" of literature and students' own experiences to create connections between texts and readers, these approaches have the potential to deepen interest in reading, facilitate the assimilation of standard critical notions, and contribute to affective development. The implementation of a more affective literary pedagogy would entail fundamental changes in our concept of literary knowing, in teacher student relationships, in teaching and learning activities, and in the organization of the classroom for instruction.

That imaginative literature no longer enjoys the popularity it once did in the curriculum of Caribbean schools--especially in the middle and senior forms/grades of secondary institutions--is a concern for all who recognize the importance of this discipline in stimulating imagination, in promoting values cultivation, and in providing students with the experience of language used in some of its most highly specialized and creative ways to represent the drama of human life. There is the empirical evidence that the number of candidates who write the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) English A (Language) annually virtually quadruples that of those who register for English B (Literature) (see Table 1). That the imbalance continues to be dramatic is testimony to the fact that the disaffection towards the latter subject remains unabated, even though there are understandable and pragmatic explanations for this disparity. Secondly, there are research findings, for example, those reported by Clarke and Wade (1996) that Barbadian high school boys, especially, are more disposed to reading non-fiction than fiction, and that while the girls read more fiction, their tastes in this genre are severely restricted. That such findings are not atypical and are, to some extent, reflective of the developmental needs of children does not make this situation any less a matter for concern. A third indicator exists in the form of the anecdotal reports from secondary school teachers about their students' lack of interest in reading fictional literature, poems, and plays.

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This situation has its roots partly in significant changes in social values, and in the economic and social crises which Caribbean communities persistently experience. These have given rise to a prevailing viewpoint that student intellectual energies are better directed to those disciplines more obviously related to social developmental goals of a utilitarian nature. Administrative policies of secondary schools also limit the participation in literary study of students in the vocational and technical streams, and children of low academic potential, especially from the middle school onwards. It is hardly surprising that English Literature has become one of the most expendable subjects on the school curriculum. Nor can we attribute this disaffection to the choice of prescribed texts in the name of cultural imperialism or cultural penetration, since wide selections of Caribbean, African, other third world, and British canonical texts are offered by CXC.

Table 1: Comparative combined figures for English A (Language) and English B (Literature) for students writing Caribbean Examinations Council General Proficiency Exams (1991-95; six territories)

Year	English A (Language)	English B (Literature)
1991	38,865	9,791
1992	40,596	10,615
1993	42,524	10,476
1994	47,350	11,591
1995	43,930	12,024

There is disquiet as well about *how* students approach the study of imaginative literature. Annual reports from CXC examiners have repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction, for example, in respect of the persistence of "formularized" responses by candidates. The examiners have stressed the importance of a literary pedagogy that reflects emphases emerging in the current literature, by urging that students be taught how to understand and interpret abstract concepts as they relate to specific texts *as well as to their own experiences* [italics added]. The 1992 report states: "Teachers must place less emphasis on equipping students with formularized critical comment and more on encouraging them to think through their own responses, supported by reasoned and accurate references to the text" (p.14).

Whether the examination requirements, specifically the number of texts prescribed and the kinds of examination questions traditionally set, encourage or even permit this kind of exploration of literature is a question that might bear some examination. The fact is that the teachers, not without good reason at times, have interpreted their function, especially in the senior grades, as one that requires a focus on the comprehension of plot and character details--a process to be facilitated by didactic and discursive methods, rather than through any reference to the learner's perceptions, experiences, or personal responses. These concerns--both examination performance and the larger disaffection with imaginative literature--suggest, as CXC implies, an urgent need for Caribbean educators to scrutinize and, if necessary, redesign our literary pedagogy so as to stimulate more interest in reading imaginative literature and more personal reaction towards literature. The directions indicated in the CXC reports represent a reconsideration of the place and value of more formal and objective (Abrams, 1953) approaches to criticism, and an acknowledgment of the legitimacy of affective perspectives. This paper proposes the latter as an alternative approach to literature instruction in Caribbean schools, while addressing some of its constraints.

Hansson (1973), writing about the teaching of English Literature in British schools, locates the source of a similar disaffection towards imaginative literature in the conflict between students' expectations of literary study and those aspects which teachers address:

> When the students rank for themselves, the most important criteria are the emotional impact of the work, the author's imagination, and the author's sincerity.... All these criteria, which pay attention to human qualities in literature are placed low down in the supposed ranking by experts and instead a number of purely formal criteria, such as form and style, aesthetic order, and symbols and metaphors, are considered to be very important. (p. 14)

For Tchudi and Mitchell (1989) the implementation of the "college model" of literature instruction that emphasizes the more formal aspects of literary study, such as the mastery of the terminology of criticism as it pertains to plot and character, among other elements, accounts for the existence of comparable attitudes in American high schools. The pattern identified by Anderson and Rubano (1991), with its accompanying emphasis on comprehension geared to the memorization of the content of poems, stories, novels, and even plays, has traditionally been an element of our pedagogy. For Hansson (1973) and Tchudi and Mitchell (1989) such approaches, which also treat texts as autonomous and self-centred entities, are limited in their effectiveness because they afford the reader's experience a limited and negligible role in making meaning, ignoring the "human meaningfulness" of literature, as Rosenblatt (1970) puts it, to which adolescents most readily respond. Translated into the context of our schools, such approaches are recognizable through the treatment of literature as content to be understood and memorized; with fixed, non-negotiable meanings to be unlocked by the individual reader or, more likely, to be dictated by teachers. Some like Carter and Long (1991) classify this as the "cultural model," a transmissive pedagogic mode through which students acquire information about texts. This approach to literary study as comprehension and terminology emanates from a concept of knowing which Rosenblatt (1970) describes as "efferent," that is, focusing on information gathering, outside of the individual's world, making little or no reference to the student's experiences or knowledge.

Instructional methodologies rooted in reader-oriented theories are considered more likely to stimulate the changes in students' attitudes to imaginative literature, and enhance their personal interpretation of texts. Beach (1993), while taking cognizance of the wide spectrum of theories classified as reader-oriented, characterizes them all as "having loosely a concern with how readers make meaning from their experience with the text" (p. 1). Unlike the traditional model which locates meaning in the text exclusively, outside the reader's experience, reader-oriented theories shift the centre of the interpretive focus to the reader and implies, as a consequence, an alternative literary pedagogy that is rooted in, or shaped by, the experiences of the reader.

It is the work of Rosenblatt (1970, 1978) which has been most influential in the development and popularity of this conceptualization of the interpretive process. Rosenblatt regards reading as a "transaction" in which both the text and the reader come together in a special way to produce interpretation. Readers draw from their past experience of life, language, and literary knowledge in their encounter with the imaginative text, infusing "intellectual and emotional meanings with the pattern of verbal symbols, and those symbols which channel thoughts and feelings" (1978, p. 25). As Rosenblatt (1970) sees it, the reader's background inevitably contributes to, or even shapes, interpretation: "We read through the lens of our own understanding; the reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment" (p. 30). This is Rosenblatt's alternative concept of literary knowing as "aesthetic," rather than "efferent," the notion that the reader constructs meaning from personal experience and from stimuli inherent in a text. "Aesthetic" reading is "lived-through" or "evoked" through an interplay between text and personal experience, and focuses on personal or inward meanings. This develops, as Langer (1992) suggests, when readers "contemplate feelings, intentions, and implications, using their knowledge of a human possibility to go beyond the meanings imparted in the text and fill out their understanding" (p. 37). For Rosenblatt (1970), fundamentally, the process of understanding a text implies a recreation of it. Similarly, Langer (1992) sees the reader as constructing a "text-world," or "envisionment" on the basis of experience and information supplied by a text, largely through "mental images" (p. 39). In a similar vein, Benson (1992) regards reading as both "recreative and re-creative."

That Rosenblatt's formulation has a special relevance to the study of canonical texts by third world peoples, is best appreciated by a consideration of the post-colonial theories about literature. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1989) note that "post-colonial literatures, spanning considerably diverse cultural traditions, have revealed with an unequivocal clarity that value, like meaning, is not an intrinsic quality but a relation between the object and a certain criteria brought to bear upon it" (p. 187). This is an acknowledgment of the role of experience influencing the construction of meaning. An example comes from Bohannan's report on teaching Shakespeare in Africa (1966), which describes the way in which patriarchal norms and assumptions frustrated the researcher's efforts to put across a traditional (if simplified) interpretation of *Hamlet* to his audience of tribesmen. A more general indicator of this link between experience and the construction of meaning is provided by Nelms (1988), who points out the extent to which teachers have always had to contend with unique responses from children:

> Good teachers of literature, especially working with less experienced students have always had to be reader-response students. They have had to live in or near the buildings their students erected. They have had to be patient with structures

> that deviated slightly or monstrously from the blueprints they saw in texts. (pp. 3-4)

A strong implication of Rosenblatt's theory is that schools must appreciate and draw on the role imaginative literature plays in the life of the young adolescent. As we have already noted, literature appeals to the young adolescent as the drama of human life and relationships, primarily through what Rosenblatt terms its "human meaningfulness," rather than through its structural features. That this value/ relationship of literature inevitably shapes response and interpretation is a contention which Hansson's (1973) research findings seem to support. Another implication is that the facilitation of the transaction between reader and text requires the activation of relevant areas of the learner's experience. Beach (1993) identifies five main areas of such experiences which correspond to the main variants of reader-response theories, the wide spectrum of considerations from which the practitioner must draw in helping students make the important connection between literature and experience. These are textual theories which privilege the reader's previous knowledge of text conventions, for example, of genres. Teachers, in other words, can refer to students' previous knowledge of, and experience with, imaginative writing to promote the transaction; experiential theories invoke perspectives which reflect the reader's emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and interests; psychological theories which emphasize the typical developmental needs and concerns of particular age groups; and social and cultural theories in which factors such as class, race, and gender become important points of reference for instruction. None of the perspectives are more important than the others; together they constitute that wide spectrum of possibilities to be exploited in the classroom, both in the introduction to texts, and for the exploration of particular aspects and elements of texts. The relevance of a text is therefore considered to exist, to some extent, within the teacher's control and is not determined exclusively by the text's geographical, historical, or social setting. Undoubtedly most texts--whatever their cultural origin--can be made more "relevant" through the activation of the appropriate element of the student's background, either experiential, textual, psychological, social, or cultural, whether actual or vicarious. In any event, it is a contention of this paper that the provision of more "culturally relevant" reading material in our schools, presently being contemplated in some quarters, will not in itself promote interest in reading; the instructional methods must be devised with that objective in view. The theories of Rosenblatt (1970) and

Beach (1993) suggest a powerful and necessary role for the foundation studies--psychology, sociology, philosophy--in teacher training programmes, not only as important disciplines in their own right, but also because of their contribution to the teacher's knowledge of the child's world, and their value in establishing the basis for more personal and aesthetic responses to literary texts.

The case for the utilization of reader-response methods in high schools is reinforced by the growing body of evidence supporting their effectiveness in promoting the development of both scholarly personal response and standard critical skills among undergraduates (Livingston, 1990; Mink, 1990; Morgan, 1993). Additional justification is to be found in the evidence that this methodology is also associated with values cultivation and the development of other personal attributes (Coles, 1989; Smagorinsky, 1990).

Even while we assert the efficacy of reader-oriented pedagogy, it is necessary to acknowledge the criticism that such perspectives--both the individual variations and the general formulation--have attracted for at least a half century. As early as 1958, Wimsatt characterized such conceptualization of the interpretive process as an "affective fallacy," questioning the legitimacy of a subjective interpretation of texts. Yet it is a contradiction that will seem to exist only if we ignore the equal partnership between text and reader proposed by the formulations of Rosenblatt and others; the version of reader-oriented theory most relevant to Caribbean examinations systems is that which recognizes both the legitimacy of the reader's experience and the integrity of the text as an intellectual literary construct, as the CXC examiners' comments appear to recommend. The development of standard "critical" responses, in other words, has a place in our pedagogy, as these responses represent the ultimate objectives of literary study provided, of course, that the examiners' standards constitute reasonable expectations for students of this age. As Rosenblatt (1970) states, "the student still needs to acquire mental habits that will lead to literary insight, critical judgement, and ethical and social understanding" (p. 75).

Education is about developing students' abilities, skills, and sensibilities; about improving the quality of their feelings, ideas, and judgements, and not about fixing them in their particular contexts. The evocation of personal response is also valuable as a basis for the development of the students' skills and perceptions, these initial responses themselves included. For Nelms (1988), response/ evocation is not a only a valid literary experience in its own right, but also constitutes the initial and necessary basis for more sophisticated stages of reading, such as interpretation--which involves an examination of significance and meaning--and, ultimately, criticism which, among other things, places texts in the history of ideas and examines the adequacy of their language and literary devices. These stages are interdependent and represent the logical unchanging sequence of the literary experience (p. 8). In terms of the reader-text relationship, the concern in Rosenblatt's formulation is with transaction, partnership; not an exclusive concentration on one or the other. Both individual experience and textual characteristics are seen as mutually influencing each other to the benefit of the reader's insights, both into texts and into personal experience. The critical challenge for educators is to determine which elements of this partnership and of these phases of literary study are to be emphasized at different stages of schooling, and in what proportion, bearing in mind anxieties about the declining interest in imaginative literature and the objectives of the examination syllabus. What the examiners expect from the English B candidates, in terms of standard critical skills, will necessarily have to be realistic and appropriate for students of this age. Yet, the universal agreement that reader-response methodologies can promote and enhance deeper and more personal, yet legitimate, critical insights into literary texts, as well as more general personal perspectives suggests a critical role for a reader-oriented pedagogy at all grade levels.

Reader-oriented instructional methods demand a more creative use of teaching and learning resources if educative transaction with literature, and the development of the personal and aesthetic response are to be effected. Of special importance is the facilitation of the process of recreation or envisionment, which is an integral element of aesthetic literary knowing. This raises questions about the suitability and value of many of the traditional classroom practices: modes of questioning which place a premium on literal comprehension; student learning activities in general; methods of testing; and the way in which the classroom is organized for instruction. Given the traditional focus on literal comprehension as a desirable objective in its own right, especially in the junior grades, and also as a stepping stone to other forms of understanding, we may not be swayed by research that supports the contention of Anderson and Rubano (1991) that poetic expression (imaginative forms of writing such as poetry, the rewriting of texts in other media) subsumes and enhances literal and cognitive understanding. Both Koch (1970) and Hull (1988) reported that students deepened their awareness of the nature and workings of poetry as a consequence of *writing their own poetry*, even though both researchers de-emphasized literal comprehension. In any event, teachers can utilize a wide array of more imaginative possibilities to stimulate literal comprehension. Even if the summative evaluation process requires the use of more traditional modes of writing, the utilization of more poetic forms is valuable for its potential to foster aesthetic response. Putting themselves in the place of fictional characters and writing personal diaries based on specific incidents is more likely to deepen students' response to, and engagement with, these textual experiences than traditional methods of writing about literature. Such approaches evoke the world of the text in the way that traditional comprehension exercises or compositions cannot, as many Caribbean educators, among them Woods (1993), have found. But the imaginative freedoms allowed the students must always be conditioned by the educational benefits likely to accrue to them from such activities.

Another traditional feature of classrooms which will require scrutiny is the reliance on whole-class, large-group instruction. There is consensus in the literature that the small group arrangement, followed by plenary sessions, is more conducive to the development of individual response. For example, Dias (1992) contends that working in small groups allows students to test their initial responses, take account of the responses of others, and recognize the several possibilities of meaning a work affords (p. 159). In addition, collaboration stimulates exploration, responsible reading, and a genuine curiosity about the interpretations of other groups (p. 160). For Thomson (1987), it provides the opportunity for students to sort out, clarify, and extend their understanding of texts in collaborative social settings which do not threaten them (p. 267). It should also promote the habit of taking responsibility for one's own response to literary texts, and the value and importance of so doing. Dias' own experiments with small group instruction in the poetry class were associated with a sophisticated degree of learning about poetry by his students. The importance of small group collaborative instruction, and some of the general and rigorous conditions for its successful implementation, have been spelt out by Cohen (1980) as well as by Nelms (1988, pp. 143-148). In light of the foregoing discussion, the value of the traditional lesson made up of whole class reading followed by comprehension; or the literature lesson in which reading skills are practised to the exclusion of educative literary activities designed to evoke personal response to texts; or the reliance on teacher-dictated or -inspired fixed and non-negotiable literary meanings, should all be very seriously reassessed. However, although the use of small groups as a means of evoking personal response and insight is to be highly recommended, thoughtful, probing questioning in the whole group setting can often achieve the same kind of result in instances where teaching time is severely limited.

Reader-oriented approaches to literary study will also necessitate a reconceptualization of teacher-student roles and relationships. What is not often recognized about this approach is that it shares the same principles and assumptions as the liberal philosophical outlook of John Dewey (1974) and the notion that the child and the curriculum are different ends of the same continuum. It has much in common, as well, with the open and alternative school movements of the 1960s, and the prevailing emphasis on student-centred learning. Underpinning all these is a philosophy of education, based on democratic ideals and buttressed by research about how the individual develops cognitively, that eschews passive learning and the concept of the teacher as the exclusive fount and dispenser of knowledge and information.

This is not to suggest that teachers should relinquish every aspect of their traditional role when utilizing reader-response methods; they will often have to perform more directive functions, occasionally explaining concepts, among other things, as their best judgement dictates. The point is, for example, that not all literary concepts have to be explained and, even more, explained at the outset of the exploration of the text in which they constitute a critical element. Imagery can be understood, and probably understood more profoundly, through its creation--using images in one's own writing--or its evocation--examining how imagery works in representing experience.

Langer (1992) anticipates a wide variety of additional teacher roles evolving from the implementation of response-oriented methods. These include seeking clarification of students' responses, inviting participation, orchestrating the discussion, helping students to focus on particular concerns, and shaping students' response--all in a manner that values the student effort and his right to a personal response (pp. 47-51). Teachers should also require students to validate responses in light of the text; this is necessary in an educational system in which knowledge of text details is highly prized, yet perfectly consistent with the idea of reading as a transaction arising out of a synthesis of text and reader.

In view of the evidence discussed above, it seems that our goals of enhanced enjoyment and increased voluntary reading of imaginative literature, as well as the multiplicity of examiners' concerns, could be achieved by a reconsideration of both the aims and methods of literary instruction in our schools. At the junior level, the personal resource model would appear to be more appropriate; in other words, we need to adopt a pedagogy grounded in aesthetic rather than efferent ways of responding to literary texts. The goal of literary study at these early stages ought to be enjoyment and response, with poetic expression as the preferred mode of writing. This concentration would not rule out a phased and careful introduction of simple literary concepts, presented in context and as necessary, and in as creative and appealing a fashion as possible, nor does it suggest any denial to the students of the pleasures implicit in linguistic patterns of literary language. A great deal of emphasis is to be placed on connecting, in the introduction of texts, and in the study of particular episodes and incidents. Woods (1993), faced with a class of poor and recalcitrant readers in a low achieving Barbadian class, planned her approaches to the prescribed text, *The Wooing of Beppo Tate*, around the traditional Caribbean practice of informal adoption, and adolescent concerns and preoccupations explored by the novel, to create points of contact between the students and the text. This is a vital stage in the process that can be affected sometimes through questions and activities which evoke experience of all types, as we have seen. The view of Rosenblatt (1970, 1978), Langer (1992), and Benton (1992) of "literary knowing" as requiring refashioning of the text world, implies a central role for learning activities which promote "imaginative recreation" such as the rewriting of incidents in other media, or various kinds of role-playing activities including "hot-seating." For drama texts, reader's theatre activities which require students to *imagine* all features of the text in production, as well as limited dramatization of some scenes, are valuable in developing an awareness of the distinctiveness of this genre. Engaging students imaginatively is recognized as one of the most effective ways of stimulating their individual responses to a text while promoting envisionment. Since such activities require a detailed familiarity with a text, as well as an inferential teasing out of its hidden layers of meaning, our concerns about promoting literal comprehension and more sophisticated interpretation are thus addressed. Activities such as story-boarding, Cloze procedures, time-lines, and text altering activities allow teachers to stimulate and test comprehension in more imaginative ways. Yet, even at this early stage, teachers might restrict the incidence of spring boarding: the-use of a text to explore issues suggested by, but only tangentially related to, that text. Teachers can experiment with a whole range of other activities to promote aesthetic response and stimulate poetic writing based on literary experiences. (See, for example, Benson, 1992; Hull, 1993; Koch, 1970; Lockwood et al. (1992); National Council of Teachers of English, 1995; Seely et al. (1990, 1991a, 1991b); Tchudi and Mitchell, Woods (1993) effectively utilized a wide spectrum of reader-oriented activities in teaching *The Wooing of Beppo Tate*, especially those promoting aesthetic reading through imaginative re-creation. Students wrote letters of recommendations for the chief character; pretended to be Beppo and wrote letters to other characters; drew pictures of the important settings of the novel. Reading the text in the class is important, but this should be supplemented by carefully planned exercises that promote aesthetic response and imaginative recreation.

Although literary study in senior examination forms requires a sharper concentration on objectives, this focus is not considered incompatible with reader-oriented approaches and emphases explored above. For one thing, as we have seen, personal response of a reasoned, persuasive and defensible kind--defensible through reference to text--has emerged as an explicit requirement of the English B examination; a desirable alternative to the learnt critical response based on topics and objectives which the syllabus routinely spells out. As we have seen, many of these examination objectives will naturally be subsumed by the larger concerns which the response oriented pedagogy seeks to address. Reader-oriented methods have a role to play in the education of older students as well. For one thing, as with the junior students, they can provide important ways into texts through the links between themes, characters, situations and settings, and students' actual or vicarious experiences; this primary stage of connection, evocation, and response, of living through the experience of a text is an important basis for the development of more sophisticated literary study as we have seen (Nelms, 1988). It has the potential to increase curiosity about, and interest in, imaginative literature, and the motivation to read it through a perception of its value and relevance to personal experience. In terms of their formal learning and their affective development of a more general nature, secondary school students of all ages benefit from a recognition of the ways in which literary texts speak to them about their actual or vicarious experiences of the world--as individuals with unique experiences or as part of a particular social or cultural setting; or simply as members of the wider community of man faced with universal dilemmas and challenges (Cobb, 1990; Livingston, 1990; Nolan, 1990; Smagorinksy, 1990).

Some combination of aesthetic and efferent knowing is necessary in these grades, given the need to focus on specific examination requirements, and to move students beyond response to a criticism *appropriate for students at this level*. For one thing, students will undoubtedly have to develop the ability to write about literature in the conventional formats required for examinations. Reader-response methods are valuable for the acquisition of many of these traditional skills, such as the mastery of the literary concepts important to this discourse, and for the knowledge of specific textual themes, for example, heroism, which CXC perennially examines. (See, for example, National Council of Teachers of English, 1996; Seely et al. 1993.) The point is that concepts such as heroism and racial and social conflict can be made more meaningful and accessible to students if they are examined in light of the experiences of the students themselves, and not regarded strictly as abstractions relevant only to specific texts, or as notions to be learnt exclusively from one's reading, as CXC itself suggests. At this level, textual validation of responses becomes even more vital, the criterion being plausibility of student interpretation in the light of textual evidence. In this way, responsible and textually defensible discussion is cultivated. What Applebee (1992) sees as an uneasy relationship between the student-centred and text-centred methodologies existing in American high schools need not be viewed in so negative a light, in view of the realities of Caribbean schools systems and, even more important, the discipline of literature itself. Reader-oriented approaches, judiciously applied at this level, can stimulate the development of insightful personal responses, the literary discourse required for these students at this level.

Some types of activities are considered especially relevant to students at CXC level. For example, personal response journals or reading logs based on texts can help to create or heighten connections, evoke and shape response and insight and, while keeping specific objectives in view, provide a sound basis for discussion and interpretation. Role-playing activities *appropriate to this age group* can also be used to stimulate insight and deeper understanding of textual issues. Especially recommended are hot-seating and similar exercises which, in addition to permitting deeper insight into character and motive, form a perfect basis for exploring point of view. Practical texts on the use of reader-oriented methods provide a whole range of other possibilities, relating to the teaching of literary elements at this level.

The successful implementation of reader-oriented strategies will require very many changes in our traditional approach to literature instruction: in our concepts of literary knowing; in our planning for instruction, in how we think of the teacher-student relationship, in our traditional methods of classroom organization and interaction. At all levels, reader-oriented approaches to literature can make the study of literature personal, relevant, active, imaginative, and enjoyable. It is a difficult challenge, particularly in the senior grades and in light of the necessary changes in teacher and student habits and expectations, but it is potentially a very rewarding one, as the experiments of some of our own educators, especially Woods (1993), have demonstrated. Improved attitudes towards imaginative writing and interpretative skills notwithstanding, the evidence that reader-oriented methods, through their exploration of the human meaningfulness of literature, can stimulate affective development of a desirable nature constitutes one of the most powerful arguments for their utilization.

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