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LRC/ENGL 680
READER-RESPONSE THEORIES
Fall 2011

Course Description:

This course is centered on theories of reader-response, focusing primarily on the transactional theory of literature as developed by Louise Rosenblatt. We will begin by considering Rosenblatt and reader response within an historical perspective and then go into an in-depth study of her theories. Our emphasis will be reading her original works rather than others' interpretations of her theories. We will move from our close focus on Rosenblatt into a brief examination of other reader-response theorists through reading original essays as well as through a broad survey of five theoretical perspectives on reader response: textual, experiential, psychological, social and cultural. We will also explore reading as a social act and encouraging multiple, diverse viewpoints within a democratic atmosphere. While our major focus is on theory, we will continuously consider the synergistic relationship between these theories and practice.

This course will be conducted as a graduate seminar where class members read, critically analyze and discuss the course readings and generate meaningful questions concerning the nature of reader-response theories and issues of classroom practice, working collaboratively toward your own well-informed understandings. The course format will be a combination of small-group and whole-class discussions of readings, engagements with literature, and occasional lectures. Seminars are not lecture courses, but focused, in-depth inquiries into a particular area of study; therefore the participation of all of us (including both our talking with and listening to each other) is important. Everyone should come prepared to discuss the readings for each week and to work actively in small and large groups with other class members. Seminar projects and papers include a life history, multiple written responses to the two Rosenblatt texts, several mini-inquiries, and a final inquiry project.

Course Objectives

- Engage in an in-depth examination of the transactional theories of Louise Rosenblatt through reading her original sources.
- Examine the influence of Rosenblatt's theories on reading education and literary criticism
- Understand the central principles of the transactional theory of reader response, particularly evocation, response, and evaluation as well as aesthetic and efferent stances.
- Explore the connections of transactional theory to education as democracy
- Explore other theories of reader response and their stance in relation to reader and text.
- Explore the implications of reader response theories for practice.

Our class experiences are based on the following beliefs about learning:

1. Learning is an active process.
We will immerse ourselves in reading and responding to professional readings and engaging in mini-inquiries. We will learn about response by exploring our own reading processes.
2. Learning is a social process of collaborating with others.
We will explore our thinking about our reading and experiences through dialogue.
3. Learning occurs as we make connections to our own experiences and explore tensions with our current beliefs.

Responses to our readings will focus on connections to our beliefs and experiences. We will share ideas and concerns from our teaching and professional experiences. We will also identify and explore tensions with our current beliefs and past experiences to interrogate our thinking.

4. Learners need choices to make connections and feel ownership.

We will have choice in our responses to reading and to the specific focus of mini-inquiries and the inquiry project.

5. Learning is reflective as well as active.

We will have many opportunities to reflect on what we are reading through writing, talking, sketching, and self-evaluations.

6. Learning occurs in a multicultural world with many ways of knowing.

Our readings and discussions will be based in valuing diversity in experiences, viewpoints, and ways of expression as resources for dialogue and critical thinking.

7. Learning is a process of inquiry.

As learners we need to search out the questions that matter in our lives and develop strategies for exploring those questions and sharing our understandings with others.

Course Readings:

Rosenblatt, Louise (1996). *Literature as Exploration*, 5th edition. New York: Modern Language Association.

Rosenblatt, Louise (1994). *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, 2nd edition. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Pradl, Gordon (1996). *Literature for Democracy: Reading as a Social Act*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann/Boynton/Cook.

Articles and chapters - located on D2L

Articles and books for small group and individual inquiry

Course Projects and Learning Experiences:

1. Participation and Attendance

Attend class regularly and actively participate in class discussions, sharing, literature discussions, written responses, and class activities. Class sessions involve discussions and collaborative engagements and are focused around our consideration of the professional readings. Read and reflect on the professional texts, write a response, and always be prepared to discuss them with others in small and whole group settings.

Because of the collaborative, participatory nature of this course, class members are expected to attend every class session and to come prepared by having completed the readings and written reflections. The heart of the seminar is our in-depth discussions of the readings with each other and so both you and your colleagues will be affected by any absence from the course. If you absolutely must miss a class session due to illness, leave a message for me in advance at the LRC office (621-1311) or through e-mail.

Contact a class member so that you are fully prepared for the next class meeting. **More than one absence or excessive tardiness/leaving early will affect your grade for the course.**

2. Revisiting a Significant Literary Event in Your Life as a Reader

Reflect on your past experiences with literature and choose a piece of literature that was a particularly significant experience for you as a child, adolescent, or adult. Write a narrative about that particular event—tell the story about the context in which you came to read and respond to the book, who was involved, and how you thought about that particular piece of literature. Also reflect on how that book connects to your own history as a person and as a reader. Reread that piece of literature and write a second narrative in which you tell the story about your current response to this rereading. What is the experience of rereading the piece of literature like for you? What kinds of connections, ideas, issues, and

thoughts come to your mind during this rereading? When you finish the second narrative, reread both of your narratives and add a reflection on how and why the two responses compare. How and why are they similar and different? Bring the book and the responses with you to class on August 30.

3. Responses to Course Readings

As you read each of the three texts this semester, develop a method for responding to your reading through post-it notes, highlighting, margin notes, written responses, etc. Be sure to mark key passages each week that you would like to discuss in class including passages you agree or disagree with, passages that provoke questioning or confusion, and passages you want to remember for your own research and writing. Bring these responses to class.

During the reading of the two Rosenblatt texts, you should prepare a written response of 1 single-spaced typewritten page for each week. Please make 5 copies of this response to share in a small group. We will be reading these in small groups and using them to enable us to have more productive discussions where each of us contribute our own responses to and interpretations of Rosenblatt.

4. Mini-Inquiry and Group Inquiry Project

After completing Literature as Exploration, we will identify questions, issues, or ideas that have developed through reading and discussion. Each class member will choose a focus for a mini-inquiry during the following week and will hand in a reflection on that mini-inquiry. The reflection will consist of a description of the question, issue, or idea and why it was important to you, what you did, and what you found through your data. The mini-inquiries might involve conducting field research, interviews, or surveys with adults or children in family, school or community settings; reflecting on classroom practice, trying out response engagements with readers; reading further on particular theorists or concepts; exploring professional literature on how teachers have put these theories into practice in their settings; reflecting on particular concepts from Rosenblatt; etc. **Due on September 27.**

Through our reflections on our experiences as readers as well as our responses to the Rosenblatt readings, we will generate our questions and issues concerning reader-response theory and classroom applications in class. Small groups will investigate particular questions or related issues of interest through reading and discussing professional books or articles. Many professional books and articles will be available and class time will be provided for the groups to meet. This on-going inquiry group will share its findings with the whole class on **October 25.**

5. Final Inquiry Project

This project should connect to your individual interests and could be an outgrowth of your mini-inquiries. Make sure that your choice for this project has a purpose in your life beyond this graduate course. You can collaborate with someone else. Possibilities for project include:

- an in-depth examination of a key theorist or concept related to reader-response theories
- an exploration of an issue from reader-response theories that traces how that issue plays out across different theorists (e.g. the role of text, the nature of talk in literary responses)
- an examination of a critical issue from Rosenblatt (e.g. efferent and aesthetic stance)
- an extensive review of research and theory related to some aspect of reader-response
- a teacher research or classroom project directly related to responding to texts (e.g. analysis of students' responses to literature; case study of a reader; a self-study; a written plan for building a response-centered curriculum in your classroom; etc.)
- another approved project of your own choosing

A brief written proposal for this project is due November 1 and the final paper is due December 6 along with a reflection on the project. Class presentations on project are on December 6.

6. Evaluation

Self-evaluation and reflection are essential to learning. For each major project, you will write a self-evaluation in which you state your goals for that project and evaluate the process you went through in reaching those goals. I will add my evaluative comments based on your statement of goals. You will also write a mid-term evaluation of your learning and an overall self-evaluation at the end of the course.

Your final grade will be based holistically on both my evaluation and your self-evaluation of your growth and learning, the quality of your written work, and your attendance, participation, and preparation for class sessions. While you can negotiate the ways in which you define and complete class projects, you must complete all of these projects to fulfill course requirements and your final grade for the course will be based on the thoughtfulness and quality of this work with a B reflecting the completion of all course projects at a satisfactory level. Incompletes will not be given for the course except in extreme situations and only with prior approval by the instructor.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES ON MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

Language, Reading and Culture, University of Arizona

The term "multicultural education" expresses the essential mission of the department and the university. Multicultural education is not just "about" certain subjects; it does not merely offer "perspectives" on education. It is an orientation to our purposes in education - and ultimately an orientation to life, one that values diversity of viewpoints and experiences and sees people as valuable contributors to the experience of school and society. Life in universities is a self-consciously multicultural

Learners bring a variety of linguistic and cognitive strengths from their families, communities and nations into the classroom; these strengths are resources to be appreciated as such by educators.

Education must expand on the linguistic and cognitive strengths that learners already possess and bring with them to the classroom, rather than ignore or try to replace them with others.

Respect and appreciation for cultural and community knowledge means that universities serve the interest of education when they allow for an exchange of views, rather than rely exclusively on a transmission model of instruction.

We recognize the existence of a variety of communities - each with its own voice and interests - both within and outside the university; a broad education offers the opportunity to hear and study as many of these voices as possible. Such an accommodation must include those communities which have traditionally been excluded or under-represented in the university.

Recognition of the validity of these general principles must be reflected in our courses, our relations with students, staff and other faculty members, and in the community life of the Department.

Tentative Course Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Projects

- August 23 Introduction to course and focus on readers and response
- August 30 Historical Context for Rosenblatt and Reader-Response Theories
Introduction to Reader-Response Theories
Read Beach, Rosenblatt, Ratner, Probst, Christenbury, Pradl, Karolides
Due: Response narrative (revisiting a significant literary event)
- September 6 Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*: The Province of Literature
Read: Forward, Preface, C. 1-2
Due: Written response (5 copies)
- September 13 Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*: The Human Basis for Literary Sensitivity
Read: C. 3-5
Due: Written Response to 3-5 (5 copies)
- September 20 Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*: Literary Sensitivity as the Source of Insight
Read: C. 6-8, Coda, Retrospect and Prospect
Due: Written Response (5 copies)
- September 27 Building from Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*
Read: The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing (Rosenblatt)
Due: Mini-Inquiry and Reflection
- October 4 Rosenblatt's *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*: Invisible Reader, Poem as Event, and Efferent and Aesthetic Reading
Read: Prefaces, C. 1-3
Due: Written Response (5 copies)
Group Inquiry
- October 11 Rosenblatt's *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*: Evoking a Poem, The Text
Read: C. 4-5
Due: Written Response (5 copies)
Group Inquiry
- October 18 Rosenblatt's *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*: The Quest for the Poem Itself, Interpretation, Evaluation, Criticism
Read: C. 6-7, Epilogue
Due: Written Response (5 copies)
Due: Mid-term Reflection
Group Inquiry
- October 25 Building from Rosenblatt's work: Sharing Group Inquiries
Due: Presentation on Group inquiry, Karolides
Written reflection on group inquiry
- November 1 Theoretical Perspectives on Reader Response
Read: Selected chapter from Beach, Cai
Due: Final project proposal

- November 8 Explorations of Key Reader-Response Theorists
Read: Selected chapters from Tompkins
- November 15 Explorations of Recent Reader-Response Theorists
Read: Selected chapters from Tompkins
- November 22 Literature and Democracy
Read: Pradl, C. 1-7
Due: Written Response (5 copies)
- November 29 Literature and Democracy
Read: Pradl, C. 8-15
Due: Written Response (5 copies)
- December 6 Presentations of Inquiry Projects
Due: Inquiry project and reflection
- December 13 Due: Final reflection and course evaluation