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**TLS/ENGL 680**  
**READER-RESPONSE THEORIES**  
**Fall 2018**

**Course Description:**

This course is centered on theories of reader-response, focusing primarily on the transactional theory of literature as developed by Louise Rosenblatt. The broad frame of the course is around dialogue, so we will start with that focus, particularly as conceived within critical pedagogy. We consider Rosenblatt and reader response within historical perspectives 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. Finally, we will explore recent conceptions of reader response as connected to cosmopolitanism. 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 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, critical pedagogy, and cosmopolitanism
- 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*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. New York: Modern Language Association.

Rosenblatt, Louise (1994). *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 your responses 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 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 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 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 29**.

### **3. Responses to Course Readings**

As you read each of the 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 4-5 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 26**.

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 24**.

### **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 **October 31** and the final paper is due **December 5** along with a reflection on the project. Class presentations on project are on **December 5**.

## **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.

**Note: Information contained in the course syllabus, other than the grade and absence policy, may be subject to change with advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.**

### **TLS Position Statement on Social Justice (3/25/2014)**

The members of the TLSS community are committed to providing equal opportunity and nurturing an academic climate dedicated to social justice. Injustice takes many forms. Oppressive acts are sometimes overt, but most are subtle, and are difficult to document. These hidden forms of discrimination are identified in the literature as microaggressions, often resulting from unexamined attitudes and beliefs. Macroaggressions are expressions of both the overt and systemic forms of injustice.

Our commitment to social justice reflects an orientation to our goals and practices in education and ultimately, an orientation to life that values a diversity and inclusion of viewpoints and experiences of all people as valuable contributors to the experience of schooling and society. This stance recognizes that individuals bring a variety of linguistic, social, and cognitive strengths from their families and communities into the classroom; we view these strengths as assets.

- We value and honor human diversity.
- We recognize that all relationships include dynamics of power. We are committed to relating to each other with conscious awareness and sensitivity to these power dynamics.
- We pledge to contribute to expanding the linguistic and cognitive strengths that learners possess and bring with them to the classroom.
- We understand that systemic policies, traditions, and laws along with personal beliefs, experiences and attitudes affect personal relationships and equitable treatment and opportunity for all.
- We strive to provide a context where we all have the venue, the opportunity, and the confidence to express our experiences and that these experiences will be heard constructively, critically, and with sensitivity.
- Hence, we are not color blind. We will not erase who someone is in the name of equality, nor deny the historical, material and emotional impacts of racialized and gendered identities, and colonial legacies.

We stand alongside and speak out with our colleagues, staff, students, and community members when any of us or others experience micro- or macroaggressions. We recognize that those of us who enjoy privileged status due to our racialized, gendered, heteronormative, or otherwise privileged aspects of our identities may be unaware of the ways this privileged status marginalizes others. We pledge to listen to our colleagues, students, staff, and community members when any of us or others make efforts to remain diligent in maintaining awareness of micro, macro aggressions, and raise our awareness around issues of invisibility, marginalization, normativity, power, and privilege.

We view these goals as both crucial and ambitious. The entrenched nature of oppression requires both institutional restructuring and new social discourses. Therefore, our stance on disrupting existing and persisting inequities requires attention to micro and macro level interactions. Every interaction is an opportunity for disrupting processes of marginalization, whether overt or subtle, both through person-to-person exchange and through resisting oppressive structures and systems. We commit to holding one other and ourselves accountable, through our research and practice, to rejecting entrenched inequalities, and to cultivating new discourses as groundwork for imagining new social worlds.

### **University Policies**

- Approved Absences All holidays or special events observed by organized religions will be honored for those students who show affiliation with that particular religion, Absences pre-approved by the UA Dean of Students (or Dean's designee) will be honored
- Students with Disabilities: At the University of Arizona we strive to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability or pregnancy, you are welcome to let me know so that we can discuss options. You are also encouraged to contact Disability Resources (520-621-3268) to explore reasonable accommodation. If our class meets at a campus location: Please be aware that the accessible table and chairs in this room should remain available for students who find that standard classroom seating is not usable.

Policies against plagiarism. The Student Code of Academic Integrity prohibits plagiarism.<http://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/policies-and-codes/code-academic-integrity>

Policies against threatening behavior by students. The ABOR Student Code of Conduct Policy 5-308 prohibits threats of physical harm to any member of the University community.  
<https://deanofstudents.arizona.edu/accountability/disruptive-student-behavior>

Policies on nondiscrimination and anti-harassment – Human Resources Policy 200E explains prohibited behaviors.  
<http://policy.arizona.edu/human-resources/nondiscrimination-and-anti-harassment-policy>

## Tentative Course Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Projects

- August 22 Introduction to course through the frame of dialogue as critical pedagogy
- August 29 Dialogue as transformation  
Context for Rosenblatt and Reader-Response Theories  
Read Peterson on types of talk and Freire on dialogue (d21)  
Due: Response narrative (revisiting a significant literary event)
- September 5 Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration: The Province of Literature*  
Read: Forward, Preface, C. 1-2 and Rosenblatt and Karolides  
Due: Written response (5 copies)
- September 12 Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration: The Human Basis for Literary Sensitivity*  
Read: C. 3-5  
Due: Written Response to 3-5 (5 copies)
- September 19 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 26 Building from Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration*  
Read: The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing  
Due: Mini Inquiry and Reflection
- October 3 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 10 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 17 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 24 Building from Rosenblatt's work: Sharing Group Inquiries  
Due: Presentation on Group inquiry, Karolides  
Written reflection on group inquiry
- October 31 Theoretical Perspectives on Reader Response  
Read: Selected chapter from Beach, Cai  
Due: Final project proposal

- November 7    Cosmopolitanism as an extension of Reader Response  
Choo and Hansen
- November 14    Cosmopolitanism as a global lens for response  
Choo and Hansen
- November 21    Literature and Democracy  
                    Read: Pradl, C. 1-7  
                    Due: Written Response (5 copies)
- November 28    Literature and Democracy  
                    Read: Pradl, C. 8-15  
                    Due: Written Response (5 copies)
- December 5    Presentations of Inquiry Projects  
                    Due: Inquiry project and reflection  
                    Final reflection
- December 12    Final