

O’Hea, John, 1995, *Responding to Literature: An Approach to developing the Reading Habit*

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

The development of the reading habit is an essential element in the teaching of reading and can be made an integral part of classroom work. This dissertation outlines an approach to the teaching of reading based on reader-response theory. It places special emphasis on the responses of children to literature.

At the beginning of the study I focus on the value of recreational reading and I compare the leisure time reading habits of Irish, English and American children. I examine the influence of I.A Richards and New Criticism on teaching methodology. I then concentrate on the work of Louise Rosenblatt and Wolfgang Iser. Both theorists place great importance on the transaction between the reader and the text. The dissertation then focuses on the role of narrative in children’s lives. I outline the developmental stages of response and list mental activities involved in responding to literature. The selection of children’s literature is also explored.

The interdependence of reading, discussion and writing in the teaching of reading is considered next. Journal writing enables children to record initial personal response. Children must be provided with the opportunity to talk openly and confidently about their reading with partners and small groups. Extended response writing is suggested as a means of encouraging children to write for an audience and with a sense of purpose. The role of the computer in responding to literature is analyzed and the problem of aligning response with assessment procedures is discussed. I conclude by examining the role of the teacher and I propose Action Research as an approach which enables teachers to look at their teaching purposes. I present teaching strategies which the teacher may use to promote the habit of reading and which incorporate response to literature.