



## **HIGH SCHOOLS STUDENTS' INSTRUCTIONAL PREFERENCES WHEN READING LITERARY WORKS OF ART**

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### **Abstract**

Despite the fact that students are an important component of the educational process, their preferences for instruction are not typically a consideration for classroom practices. The purpose of this survey study was to determine high school students' preferences for methods used in the instruction of literary works of art. Students expressed preferences for instructional methods that promoted either aesthetic or efferent stances as explained in Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory. In addition, this study explored students' reasons for preferences and examined correlations between gender, reading concepts, reading attitudes, and students' preferences for instructional methods. Students preferred the instructional method that promoted an aesthetic stance (60.72 %) which using a chi-square nonparametric test were statistically significant  $\chi^2 (1, n = 84) = 3.857, p = .05$ .

### **Introduction**

If schools were a democracy, students would vote for the type of instruction they like the best! Unfortunately, the students are rarely requested to express their preferences for how they are taught (Erickson and Shultz, 1992); even though, Paley (1986) and Evans (2002) have discussed that the student's point of view is the ultimate reality within the classroom. In this study, we created conditions for students to voice their preferences for methods used for teaching them to read and comprehend literary texts. Students who participated in this research project expressed and provided reasons for preferring one of two approaches to reading and working with short stories. Reasons for preferences ranged from comments such as, "I got to state my opinion about the story and see how the story was important to me." to "I think you learn more when you get asked the questions." This study contributes information on students' preferences for working with literature to a body of research that is typically limited to the researchers' points of view, not the students' points of view.

Additionally, this study relates well to the principles of democracy because students participated in discussions that enabled them to experience multiple perspectives. Regardless of which instructional approach they preferred, these students indicated they valued an opportunity to participate in a democratic endeavor that allowed them to voice their own perspective for how they transacted with literary texts, as well as being afforded the opportunity to listen to other participants' perspectives of how they transacted with the texts to personally construct meaning.

In fact, one student referred to listening and discussing others' perspectives when he stated "I got to hear what other people thought of the story."

In explanations of her transactional theory, Louise Rosenblatt (1994, 1995) provides a convincing rationale for using aesthetic rather than efferent methods for teaching literary works of art. In fact, Rosenblatt (1978) stated that because of classroom experiences while teaching literature courses at the postsecondary level she saw "the value of interchange among students as a stimulant to the development of critical and self-critical reading, essential to citizens of a democracy" (p. 180). Because of her observations, she wrote the book, *Literature as Exploration*, which articulates her perspectives. Rosenblatt's position assumes that an aesthetic stance is more appropriate when students read poems, novels, plays, and stories. Aesthetic teaching focuses students on reading for the purpose of living through and experiencing the literary work of art. Efferent teaching focuses students on reading for the purpose of recalling the information in the text. What purpose and stance do students actually prefer when reading literary texts? As Paley (1986) suggested, the student's point of view is of utmost importance in the classroom. Therefore, it is necessary to consider students' preferences and insights into the instructional methods used in literature classrooms.

Researchers in other areas of literacy have suggested that a wide range of factors influence students' preferences. In some of these studies, gender has been associated with students' actions and preferences related to literacy and literature (Alvermann et al., 1996; Dutro, 2001; McKenna, 1994). Other researchers have implied that instructional preferences are influenced by students' views of the actions readers take during the reading process, i.e., their concepts of reading (Edwards, 1962; Lesesne, 1991). Additional research findings have suggested that students' attitudes toward reading influence their preferences for instructional methods (Ivey, 1999; Lesesne, 1991; Ley, Schaer, & Dismukes, 1994; Mitchell & Ley, 1996).

What do students prefer when they transact with literary works of art—specifically, in this study, with short stories? In this article, we review recent studies related to instructional methods and transactional theory, methodologies used in these research efforts, and the results of our study identifying students' instructional preferences for reading short stories. In addition, we describe students' explanations of the reasons and factors influencing their preferences and we discuss implications and recommendations based on what the students said about aesthetic and efferent approaches to teaching literature.

### **Theoretical Perspectives And Past Research Efforts**

In a pioneering book published in 1938, *Literature As Exploration*, Louise Rosenblatt introduced revolutionary concepts concerning the reading process. Her ideas challenged dominant practices and traditions in the elite worlds of literary theory, philosophy, and education. Rosenblatt labeled her theory the transactional theory of the literary work, but it is more commonly known as transactional theory. This theory encourages teachers to provide instruction that privileges living through or experiencing a literary work of art over recalling information in the text. One strand of research (Cox & Many, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c; Zarillo & Cox, 1992; Wilhelm, 1995) describes instruction that puts transactional theory into action by emphasizing the textual experience. Another line of research documents a prevalence of literary instruction that emphasizes recall rather than "experiencing" (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988; Cope, 1997; Many & Wiseman, 1992; Zarillo & Cox, 1992). The missing link in this body of research was an exploration of students' preferences related to the two types of literary instruction.

Louise Rosenblatt (1994, 1995) described reading as an interwoven process between the reader and the text. She explained this process as a transaction of mutual respect, where both the reader and the text must be present for the reader to construct meaning. When transacting with a text, readers are actively involved in construction of meaning as they call upon all past experiences, sensations, and images, as well as their responses to the current transaction. The text also plays an integral part during the reading transaction because the text provides the symbols that serve as the focus for the readers' attention and activates past experiences. As a result, individuals may read the same text and have different transactions because they approach the text based on their sole experiences.

Rosenblatt (1994) contended that transactions occurring between readers and literary works of art are different from other reading events. She argued that the appropriate stance for reading literary works such as poems, novels, plays, and stories is an aesthetic one. An aesthetic stance leads readers to focus on what they are experiencing during the reading event. When reading aesthetically, readers live through the text in ways that are personally meaningful. When reading a novel about the Great Depression in the United States, for example, readers may focus on their feelings, attitudes, sensations, and ideas as they live through the agony of being without food or shelter and then connect that agony with the experiences of homeless people today.

When reading aesthetically, readers focus on what is happening to them individually during the reading experience. Rosenblatt (1994) insisted that literary texts are created as works of art and, as such, should be read from this aesthetic stance, which emphasizes the affective or emotional aspects of the transaction. She went on to explain that the aesthetic transaction, if allowed to mature, becomes an *evocation* "...in which the reader selects out ideas, sensations, feelings, and images drawn from his past and synthesizes them into a new experience, the evocation--the poem, story, novel, play" (1989, p. 40). During aesthetic transactions, readers focus on the responses evoked by the text and select those that will become their personal evocations for the literary work. Once the evocation occurs, the reader can then attend to what Rosenblatt labeled the interpretation. Interpretations are efforts by readers to describe the nature of the lived-through experience or evocation. Rosenblatt contended that evocations cannot be held static for subsequent reflection; cannot be shared directly with others; and cannot be the same for different readers even for the same literary text because of their ultimately private nature. However, readers can report and discuss interpretations of their evocation with others, even though this is sometimes complicated and problematic due to communication difficulties.

Contrasting nonliterary texts to literary works of art, Rosenblatt (1994) explained the nature of transactions involved in reading expository texts such as textbooks, newspaper articles, cookbooks, and scientific texts. She stated that efferent reading is the appropriate stance for reading nonliterary texts. The efferent stance leads readers to focus on information that will be carried away from the text and may be applied to literary as well as nonliterary texts. Let's return to the Great Depression novel as an example. As readers transact with this text, they may assume an efferent stance as well as, or even instead of, an aesthetic stance and concentrate on the accuracy of events or the economic causes and effects of this difficult time in U.S. history.

Typically, efferent reading results in different readers constructing a more common interpretation of meaning than aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 1994). In other words, when someone efferently reads and summarizes a text, they are likely to come up with an interpretation that is very similar to the summary produced by another person's efferent transactions with the same text. In addition, a reader may share a summary with someone who has never read that text, and the person who receives it can carry away accurate information without experiencing the

entire text personally. Unlike the aesthetic stance which requires a personally experienced and private evocation, the efferent stance tends to focus on the knowledge retained rather than the emotions experienced. Cox and Many (1992a) described another component of efferent reading that involves “an analysis of the text” (p. 106). Instead of reading to collect and retain knowledge, the reader is called upon to read efferently for the purpose of examining and analyzing particular aspects of the text. Often others impose this type of efferent reading upon readers as they are required to scrutinize text and critically analyze literary elements, techniques, or figurative language used by author. Applying this type of efferent stance to the Great Depression novel, for example, instructors might ask readers to search for metaphors used by the author to compare the time period of the Great Depression to a human lifespan.

Rosenblatt (1994) insisted that readers’ transactions with literary works of art are much more complex than transactions with nonliterary texts. Due to the complexity and depth of responses possible for fully constructing meaning from literary works, Rosenblatt emphatically stated that readers always should be allowed to approach literary works first from an aesthetic stance and then given time to develop the evocation. She went on to explain that the subsequent interpretation of the evocation of a literary work of art involves a “mainly efferent activity-- as readers look back on the reading event” (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 270). Furthermore, Rosenblatt cautioned against rushing the reader into an efferent analysis of the literary work of art. She reckoned that once the reader has evoked a literary work of art; the reader needs to deepen the experience of the text by returning to, reliving, and savoring it during a period of reflection. Rosenblatt argued that in order for literary works of art truly to be “literature” for readers, readers must be free to experience them before they subject them to reflection and interpretation.

Aesthetic and efferent stances, as Rosenblatt (1994) explained, assist readers in determining what they attend to when transacting with a text. The reader’s stance can be a conscious or unconscious choice, but the choice of stance predisposes the reader to absorb particular aspects of meaning. Reading stance, as Rosenblatt explained, exists along a continuum with the efferent on one end and the aesthetic on the other end; this stance usually does not remain static during a reading event. Readers may choose to move along the continuum as their attention and personal responses change during the transaction. It is important to note that the same text, whether a literary work of art or a nonliterary text, may be read from a stance reflecting either a dominant aesthetic or efferent stance; the reader’s purpose or focal point determines the dominate stance.

Although the aesthetic stance is the most appropriate stance for reading literary works, traditional teaching methods normally promote an adoption of the efferent stance (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1994, 1995; Zarrillo & Cox, 1992). Instruction of this type typically forces students to analyze text and to remember specific details, rather than to experience the text (Many & Wiseman, 1992, p. 252). An example of an efferent teaching approach for the Great Depression novel is when teachers tell readers to complete question sheets that require attention to very specific text details and literary elements. When instruction promotes such experiences students are not given opportunities to respond to the text in a personal, affective manner; instead, students engage in a search for facts or in an analysis of the text. Thus, students are basically removed from the literary experience described by Rosenblatt as the “living through” a literary work of art.

On the other hand, aesthetic instructional methods assist students in living through the literary work of art rather than focusing on facts or analyses. According to Zarrillo and Cox (1992), aesthetic teaching promotes opportunities for “students to shape individual responses to a text” (p. 242). Further, aesthetic teaching provides students the opportunity to experience the

“personal aspects of the lived-through experience...the scenes, the associations, images, and feelings called to mind by the students while reading...” (Zarrillo & Cox, 1992, p. 242). In the study reported here, we went directly to students as readers and asked them to voice their preferences for efferent or aesthetic teaching approaches to one type of literary work of art, the short story, and to share the reasons and factors that influence their choices.

## **Methodology**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to determine high schools students’ preferences for stance and instructional methods when reading short stories. Specifically, students were asked to choose between a lesson that promoted an aesthetic stance and one that promoted an efferent stance. In addition, students’ concepts of reading, attitudes, and gender were considered as possible influencing factors for which stance students would prefer. The following research questions guided the study:

1. When reading a literary work, do high school students prefer instruction that promotes an aesthetic stance or instruction that promotes an efferent stance?
2. What is the relationship between instructional preference and gender?
3. Do students’ concepts of reading influence their instructional preference?
4. Do students’ attitudes toward reading influence their instructional preference?
5. What reasons and factors are reported when students explain why they prefer a particular stance and/or instructional method?

### **Setting**

The participating school district was located in a rural area in a southeastern state. The school was located in a bedroom community between two towns. One town is primarily a professional, academic community with a large university, and the other is primarily a business and industrial community. The school had an enrollment of 484 students in Grades 9 through 12. The student population was 70% Caucasian and 30% other ethnic backgrounds. The sample population was comprised of 250 students in Grades 9 through 12 who were enrolled in language arts classes during the first semester of the school year. Typical language arts classes in this school featured a heavy emphasis on grammar and a limited emphasis on literature. Speaking with the language arts teachers in the school and observing classes, the primary researcher and first author found that literary instruction here focused on teaching background information, using study guides, and providing or leading students to an interpretation deemed correct by the teacher, or by producers of materials and textbook resources used for instruction.

### **Sample**

Participants in the sample for this study were 84 high school language arts students who returned consent forms that parents or guardians signed to give permission for participation. The gender composition of the sample was 37 males and 47 females. The sample was drawn from the approximately 150 tenth- and eleventh-grade students enrolled in language arts classes for the first semester. Students’ ability levels ranged from above average to average or below, and they were assigned to honors level or regular classes as described in the school’s course descriptions.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for each group occurred over a two-day period. Prior to data collection, the researcher wrote two basic teaching scripts (aesthetic and efferent) for conducting the lessons that were grounded in the literature (Farnan & Kelly, 1993; Rosenblatt, 1994, 1995; Wiseman & Many, 1992; Wilhelm, 1997). The scripts were field-tested and revised based on these

preliminary efforts. In addition, an expert panel consisting of university professors reviewed the scripts, and the researcher made revisions based on their recommendations. (See Appendix A) These scripts were used to provide structure and consistency among the different groups of high school students. Each of the four groups consisted of an intact class at the school. The presentation of text and teaching script was changed for each group to minimize carryover effects. Short stories were chosen for the two instructional episodes based upon a pilot study conducted previously. The stories chosen to be used with the instructional scripts were “Mildred” and “White Chocolate” contained in Donald Gallo’s edited book, *Connections: Short Stories By Outstanding Writers for Young Adults*.

On the first day, each student completed the Teale-Lewis Reading Attitude Scale (1980) and the Edward’s Concept of Reading (1962). Upon completion of the two instruments, students were taught one lesson focusing on aesthetic or efferent instructional methods by the primary researcher and first author. Order of the instructional methods and texts was rotated. After the first instructional episode, students completed an open-ended questionnaire in which they wrote responses about specific aspects of the lesson. (See Appendix B)

On the second day of data collection, the researcher conducted the other lesson based on aesthetic or efferent instructional methods, and students completed another open-ended questionnaire. This questionnaire focused on the second day of instruction but had items that asked students to compare both days of instruction. Using a forced-choice item on the second questionnaire, students were required to choose the lesson they preferred from the two they participated in on the two days of instruction. Finally, students were asked to describe the components of the preferred lesson that helped them to understand and enjoy the story. (See Appendix C)

## **Results Of The Study**

**Question 1:** When reading a literary work, do high school students prefer instruction that promotes an aesthetic stance or instruction that promotes an efferent stance?

High school students’ preferences for efferent or aesthetic instructional methods were assessed by a forced-choice question that asked students to indicate their preferred lesson as lesson 1 or lesson 2 on the final day of the study. Students in this sample exhibited very definite preferences. Of the 84 participants, 60.72% preferred the instructional method promoting an aesthetic stance. Thus, 39.28% of students in the study preferred the instructional method that promoted an efferent stance. The null hypothesis predicting no difference between percentages of students who preferred one of the two instructional methods was rejected because results indicate a 21.44% difference in participants’ preferences for the instructional methods. As a follow-up to the original question, a chi-square nonparametric test was conducted to examine differences between the observed and expected frequencies for students’ preferences, and it indicated that those differences were statistically significant  $\chi^2 (1, n = 84) = 3.857, p = .05$ .

**Question 2:** What is the relationship between instructional preference and gender?

A chi-square test was used to examine the relationship between preference and gender. The test resulted in a coefficient  $\chi^2 (1, n = 84) = 1.23 (p = .267)$ . This statistical procedure indicated a statistically non-significant relationship between gender and instructional preference. Of the total of 37 male students, 54.1% preferred aesthetic instructional methods while 45.9% preferred efferent instructional methods. Female students’ preferences were more disparate. Of the 47 female students, 66% preferred aesthetic instructional methods while 34% preferred efferent instructional methods.

**Question 3:** Do students' concepts of reading influence their instructional preference?

A logistic regression was used to investigate this research question. The test was performed with students' instructional preference as the outcome measure and one predictor variable, the students' scores on the Edwards' Reading Concept Test (1962). Analysis was performed using SPSS. The test was statistically non-significant,  $\chi^2(1, n = 84) = 0.099$ ,  $p = .75$ , indicating that students' concepts of reading do not predict instructional preference.

**Question 4:** Do students' attitudes toward reading influence their instructional preference?

A logistic regression was used to examine this research question. The test was performed with students' instructional preference as the outcome measure and one predictor variable, students' total score on the Teale-Lewis Reading Attitude Scale (1980). The test was statistically non-significant  $\chi^2(1, n = 84) = .40$ ,  $p = .53$ , indicating that students' attitudes toward reading did not predict instructional preference. Following up on the original research question of whether reading attitudes influenced instructional preferences, additional analyses were conducted using the sub-scale score data with logistic regression. Three separate logistic regression tests were used to explore the predictability of the sub-scale scores on instructional preference. The test was performed with students' instructional preference as the outcome measure. Each of the three sub-scales, utilitarianism, enjoyment, and individual development from the Teale-Lewis Reading Attitude Scale (1980), were used separately as predictor variables. Tests for both the utilitarianism and enjoyment sub-scales were statistically non-significant, indicating that students' attitudes toward utilitarian reading and reading for enjoyment did not predict their instructional preferences. However, the test for the individual development sub-scale was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, n = 84) = 5.2$ ,  $p = .02$  with a Cox and Snell coefficient = .074, lending support to the premise that students' individual development attitudes toward reading predict and are significantly correlated to their instructional preferences. When participants' scores on the individual development sub-scale were higher, the probability that they would choose the aesthetic instructional method was greater than the probability that they would choose the efferent instructional method.

**Question 5:** What reasons and factors are reported when students explain why they prefer a particular stance and/or instructional method? (See Appendices B and C)

Students who preferred the aesthetic instructional method had several insights and reasons in common in their explanations of preferences. Of the 51 students who preferred the aesthetic instructional methods, 35 (69%) made comments pertaining to specific characteristics of the actual aesthetic instruction they experienced as opposed to general comments about the lesson itself. Of course, many students made more than one comment for the questions. Therefore, students had to make at least one comment to be counted in this number.

Student response patterns seemed to fall into several categories. The first category involved positive comments about creating their own story map for the short story in the lesson, and the majority of all the comments, 39%, fell into this category. Second, students discussed the benefits of having their own opinions and meanings favored over a preferred opinion or a correct meaning. Of all the comments, 21% fell into this category. Third, students reported that students' interactions during whole class discussions helped them to expand and broaden their perspectives. This category accounted for 20% of the comments made by students. Next, students often made comments concerning the impact the lesson had on their learning and understanding of the story. Student comments in this category made up 14% of the total responses. Fifth, students asserted that these lessons stimulated more student-driven questions

during the lesson than teacher-driven questions. Only 6% of the comments were included in this category. Finally, on a more general note, many students wrote that they experienced more enjoyment when they were more involved as active contributors to the lesson, when they were able to express their creativity in the lesson, and when they were able to share with their peers.

Students who preferred the efferent instructional methods also shared common insights and reasons in explanations of their instructional choice. Of the 33 students who preferred the efferent instructional methods, 25 made comments concerning specific characteristics of efferent teaching. Students who expressed a preference for efferent instruction wrote more comments than students who said they preferred aesthetic instructional methods. However, the comments from students who preferred efferent instructional methods showed less variation than comments of students who preferred the aesthetic instructional method.

Responses of students who preferred the efferent method could be separated into four categories. First, these students stated they appreciated the comprehension questions they were required to answer. Of the total comments, 34% of the comments fell into this category. Second, students who favored an efferent instructional model described different components of the character mapping in this activity. This category accounted for 31% of the students' comments. In the third category, students pointed out that the efferent instructional method allowed them to get the right meaning of the story in 19% of the total comments. Finally, students who preferred the efferent instructional method seemed to favor the structure involved in this method with 16% of student comments falling into this category.

### **Discussion And Implications**

Louise Rosenblatt's (1995) transactional theory served as the foundation for this study. The results of this study support Rosenblatt's theory, especially her assertions regarding aesthetic and efferent stances. They also support her recommendations concerning how literary works of art should be taught to all students. Students' preferences and comments affirmed her transactional theory with regard to how readers should experience literary works of art and how teachers should instruct students to experience literary works of art.

Rosenblatt's (1994) description of the aesthetic stance involves a "living through" of the literary work of art. This stance provides readers with opportunities to create their own meanings of texts. In essence, no one can create a full aesthetic experience, or evocation, for the reader; it is the reader's own creation. In addition, Rosenblatt (1995) stated that there is not one correct meaning or interpretation for a literary work of art. However, she also noted that some interpretations are more text-defensible than others. This view of a literary transaction describes a highly personal experience for the reader and involves the reader's personally derived meaning.

In this study, the finding that the majority of students (60.7%) preferred the aesthetic instructional method certainly adds emphasis to Rosenblatt's (1995) assertion that literary works of art should be taught from an aesthetic instructional stance. In addition, students' comments resoundingly substantiate Rosenblatt's insistence that the reader should transact with a literary work of art from an aesthetic stance. Students' comments illustrate Rosenblatt's theoretical constructs, especially those based on the idea that there is not one correct meaning. Several students' comments highlight the importance of voicing their own opinions and of not being expected to conform to a preferred opinion. In addition, students reveal the highly personal nature of an aesthetic transaction with comments such as, "it let me show what I thought about the story."



Rosenblatt (1995) proclaimed that aesthetic reading comes from the desire to have a totally engaging or compelling experience simply for the sake of the experience. This idea revolves around the intrinsic nature of the aesthetic transaction. The results of the Individual Development sub-scale analysis indicate that students who view reading literary works of art as a more individualized, intrinsic activity prefer the aesthetic instructional method. Students' comments also reveal that they appreciate the intrinsic experiences and personal involvement of aesthetic reading. For example, one student explained that the web construction "got me more involved in the story because my mind worked a little more." Another student stated aesthetic instructional methods "make me stretch my brain and think a little harder." These students saw the value of thinking for themselves, thus revealing the intrinsic involvement that is encouraged through aesthetic instructional methods.

Rosenblatt (1989) defined the efferent stance as involving readers who focus on the public meaning of the text; that is, the meaning that can be carried away from the text. The idea is that certain information will remain with each reader upon completion of the text. In this type of reading, the amount of information carried away upon completion of the reading is often quantified. For example, comprehension questions may be designed to determine what and how much the reader remembers from the text. During this type of reading transaction, the emphasis is on the facts and details contained in the text. To explain efferent reading, Rosenblatt (1994) said that someone could read a comprehensive summary of the text and gain the same amount of information as someone who reads the entire text. In efferent reading, the focus is on the information contained in the text, not the individual's unique, aesthetic experience created while reading the text. In addition, Rosenblatt discussed the extrinsic nature of the efferent stance. Usually, the purposes for efferent reading are imposed on the student from external sources, such as teacher's questions or tests. Rosenblatt believed that when external purposes are forced on readers of literary works, the reader becomes locked into a primarily efferent stance that is inappropriate for these works of art.

Almost 40% of students in this study preferred the efferent instructional method and provided comments that confirm Rosenblatt's (1994) explanations of the efferent stance. Their comments emphasized the public meaning of the short story. One student positively commented about comprehension questions because they supplied a good review ". . . if you were to be tested." Another comment revealed that many students value comprehension questions because they "made me realize details that I didn't see at first." These students tend to view the reading of literary works of art as a task with extrinsic purposes. They saw the process as one that should focus on information in the short story, not the experience that they could have while reading it. One of the strongest indicators that students feel they must derive a public meaning from reading short stories was the comment, "Remembering is more important than understanding."

The theoretical underpinnings of this study were grounded in Louise Rosenblatt's (1995) transactional theory, which she has espoused and explained for over six decades. These contemporary students' preferences and comments made apparent the timelessness of Rosenblatt's theory, and the preeminence of her concepts related to aesthetic and efferent stances. In addition, the students' preferences and comments provide a further rationale for applying transactional theory in educational institutions and practices at all levels, especially in literature classes where teachers and students engage in reading literary works of art.

As for educational implications, we think that these results should convince educators of the importance of including students' voices in the process of instructional planning and delivery. We hope that the responses of students' reported in this study will encourage teachers

at all levels to see that identifying and considering students' instructional preferences is a necessary part of implementing informed instruction. Peck (1992) stated that reader stance is likely a learned behavior. Thus, teachers must assist students in learning to adopt the appropriate stance for reading literary works of art and nonliterary texts. Rosenblatt (1994) and the majority of students in this study strongly support the aesthetic stance as the most appropriate stance for reading literary works of art. In addition, Molinelli (1995) suggested that a teacher's instructional stance influences stances students take as readers. If teachers engage students in reading literary works of art with efferent methods, they may be teaching a stance that will be learned and have lasting effects that limit students' ability to transact fully with literary works.

The most resounding result in this study is not the preference expressed by the majority of students for aesthetic teaching of literature but the reasons for those preferences. The students told us that they want to be critical thinkers and that they want teachers who help them read to fully experience literature as works of art and as sources for insights and connections related to their life experiences. We hope that these comments will encourage more teachers to give students the opportunities to explore the depth of aesthetic transactions with literary texts.

Rosenblatt (1995) discussed the importance of students being able to develop discriminating attitudes of mind; that is being able to think critically. If educators wish to foster students' critical thinking abilities, then certainly students need to be able to trust their own experiences with literary works of art. As students realize that their own creations of meaning are important, they will be more likely to adopt an aesthetic stance when reading literary works of art. As a result, students will be more likely to develop their critical thinking skills. However, if they know that only one correct meaning (usually from the teachers' guide for the literary work) is allowed, they will adopt a more efferent stance, promoting in-text answers and inhibiting critical thinking skills. The challenge is to use the information given by Louise Rosenblatt to help students develop the ability to trust themselves as they create their own meanings for literary works of art.

Ruddell (1995) conducted a research project in which he described the characteristics of Influential Teachers labeled as such because former students identified them as teachers who had a major impact on their academic or personal lives. Former students of the teachers said they were the ones who promoted internalized motivation in them as readers through the use of aesthetic instructional stances. Ruddell reported a recommendation offered by Influential Teachers for those who would strive to become Influential Teachers: Teachers should develop students' interests and assist students in creating authentic meaning from a text. Students' comments in this study support Ruddell's findings that teachers who instruct students to read for intrinsic purposes support and influence students' learning in lasting ways. These comments lend credence to the idea that promoting internal rather than external purposes for reading strengthens students' personal involvement and experiences literary works of art.

What educational and instructional implications can be drawn from comments produced by students who preferred the efferent instructional methods when reading literary works of art? Perhaps these students should be assisted in adopting aesthetic stances to literary works of art. It is likely that the students who prefer aesthetic instructional methods are more familiar and comfortable with the aesthetic stance. In contrast, it is also likely that those students who prefer the efferent teaching are less familiar and not as comfortable with the aesthetic teaching as they are with the efferent approaches. It then becomes the educator's responsibility to promote an appropriate stance for literary works of art by guiding and helping these students take a more aesthetic stance when reading literary works of art. As teachers provide necessary support and as

students become more comfortable taking ownership for creating their own meaning during aesthetic transactions, the teacher can gradually remove support until finally the responsibility for the aesthetic transaction lies primarily with the student. The ultimate goal is for students to create their very own evocation of a literary work of art.

### **Limitations And Further Questions**

The primary limitation of this study is that it provides a description of students in one school during a short two-day period, thus more research is needed to support these findings.

1. This study reported students' preferences at a particular point in time. However, these findings may not indicate their preferences at another time. Would these results be the same if students were exposed to efferent and aesthetic teaching of literary works over a longer period of time?
2. Although teachers' comments and observations of language arts classes in this school support efferent not aesthetic instruction as the more typical and familiar approach to having students work with literary texts (Carlsen & Sherrill, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1994, 1995; Zarrillo & Cox, 1992), the majority of these students preferred the aesthetic instructional method. This leads us to ask- do students have to resist or overcome the effects of being taught to read literary works of art primarily for efferent purposes in order to develop a preference for aesthetic instructional methods? The answer to this question was not available in the data generated by this study and will have to be addressed through additional research efforts.
3. Since almost 40% of students preferred the efferent instructional methods, research that more thoroughly investigates students' insights and reasons for preferring efferent methods should be conducted. What are the specific reasons, situations, and types of literary works of art for which students prefer the efferent instructional method?
4. This study was descriptive in nature and the statistically significant indicators that students prefer aesthetic over efferent teaching for literary texts do not support inferences that causal relationships exist between teaching approaches and students' attitudes and learning. We need experimental studies to examine preferences for aesthetic and efferent teaching, their effects on learning and attitudes toward reading for literary and nonliterary texts, and how each affects both factual and thoughtful comprehension of students reading different types of texts.

### **Conclusions**

Student voices in the classroom and preferences for instruction can become a tool for changing educational practices. Comments and preferences in this study support Rosenblatt's (1995) theoretical positions and provide findings that parallel results from various research efforts examining tenets of her theory. As Rosenblatt (cited in Karolides, 1999) so eloquently stated, "if traditional methods of teaching and testing are continued, . . . it will lead to the feeling that, in school, the really important things are the skills to be acquired and demonstrated" (p. 167) instead of the abilities needed to become independent thinkers and learners. If we truly wish to create thoughtful, critical thinkers in our classrooms, a more aesthetic teaching stance needs to be considered and implemented more often. In this study, a majority of students wanted opportunities to create their own meanings, to defend their created meanings, and to hear the meanings created by others—they wanted to be critical thinkers, not fact-finders!

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-----“Now, after all we’ve said, what is the most important thing about the story for you?

Discuss with a partner, then discuss as a class.

- a. Students will create a map using their answers from step number 4. They can add information based on the discussions and reflections since they wrote that answer.

**\*\*Note:** Once students have responded aesthetically, they will be prompted by the researcher to support their opinions, ideas, and interpretations contained on their map from #7 with evidence and citations from the story by asking questions “How was the author able to . . .?” or “How did the author make you . . .?”



**Efferent Script****Text A****Pre-Reading**

1. Quick-Write—students write for 30 seconds anything that comes to their minds when asked the following question.  
-----“What do you know about brothers and sisters?”  
The whole class discusses their brainstorming.

**During-Reading**

2. Read first and second paragraphs.  
Ask the following questions.  
-----“What happened in these two paragraphs?”  
-----“What character traits does Mildred have?”  
-----“How is the author developing these traits?”  
The whole class discusses these questions.
3. Read to middle of story (pg. 99 at the word “dark”)  
Ask the following questions.  
-----“What happened in the story to this point?”  
-----“What character traits do we see in Mildred now?”  
-----“How is the author further developing these character traits?”  
The whole class discusses these questions.

**Post-Reading**

4. Complete the story.  
Review the character traits that were discussed in numbers 2 & 3.  
  
Ask the following questions.  
-----“How did the author develop these traits that we see in Mildred at the end of the story?”  
The whole class discusses the answers to the question.
5. Students will complete a character web for Mildred on a web given to them.
6. Students will answer comprehension questions based on the story.
  - a. What was Mildred’s sister’s name?
  - b. How much older was her sister?
  - c. What was one of the things that Mildred’s sister did to cause problems with the parents?
  - d. Why was Mildred’s sister coming back home?
  - e. What was ironic about the ending of the story?
  - f. How did the first Mildred get her name?

**Efferent Script**  
**Text B**

**Pre-Reading**

7. Quick-Write—students write for 30 seconds anything that comes to their minds when asked the following question.  
 -----“What do you know about students who cause trouble in school?”  
 The whole class discusses their brainstorming.

**During-Reading**

8. Read first paragraph.  
 Ask the following questions.  
 -----“What happened in this paragraph?”  
 -----“What character traits does Wally have?”  
 -----“How is the author developing these character traits?”  
 The whole class discusses these questions.
9. Read to middle of story (end of pg.87)  
 Ask the following questions.  
 -----“What happened in this section of the story?”  
 -----“What character traits does Wally have now?”  
 -----“How is the author further developing these character traits?”  
 The whole class discusses these questions.

**Post-Reading**

10. Complete the story.  
 Ask the following questions.  
 -----“How would you summarize this part of the story?”  
 -----“What character traits does Wally have now?”  
 -----“How did the author develop these traits throughout the story?”  
 The whole class discusses the answers to these questions.
11. Students will complete a character web for Wally on a web given to them.
12. Students will answer comprehension questions based on the story.
- What class does Wally really hate?
  - What is the first reason Wally gives for not liking his English teacher?
  - When Wally visits the principal’s office, what does he tell the principal about the English teacher?
  - How does Wally make fun of the principal’s name?
  - Why did the author choose the title “White Chocolate?”

**Appendix B**  
**Open-Ended Questionnaire**  
**Day 1**

**Student Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Please answer the following questions honestly. There are no right answers, so take your time and think about the experiences of the past two days. If you need additional space, ask the researcher for more paper.

**Answer the following questions.**

1. What activities or questions in this lesson did you really like?

Why?

2. What activities or questions in this lesson did you dislike?

Why?

**Appendix C**  
**Open-Ended Questionnaire**  
**Day 2**

**Student Number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Please answer the following questions honestly. There are no right answers, so take your time and think about the experiences of the past two days. If you need additional space, ask the researcher for more paper.

**Answer the following questions.**

1. What activities or questions in this lesson did you really like?

Why?

2. What activities or questions in this lesson did you dislike?

Why?

**Circle your answer to the following question.**

1. Which lesson did you prefer?

Lesson 1

Lesson 2

**Answer the following questions.**

2. What happened in the preferred lesson to really help you understand the short story?
3. Why do you think that these helped you to understand the short story?
4. If you have any other comments, questions, or suggestions, please address them here.