

'Personal Response' in English Teaching

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This paper examines the ways in which a certain conception of 'personal response' to literature became one of the means by which the moral and ethical development of the child could be monitored and directed by the teacher-counsellor in the individualistic milieu of the school. Personal response has traditionally been viewed as the mechanism by which the child could achieve the final project of english; cultural completion through the perfect conjunction of thought and feeling expressed as the 'genuinely felt response'. It is argued here, however, that 'personal response', rather than fulfilling a particular vision of english, has become an ancillary to a wider project of moral supervision.

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The words 'personal response' or 'response' have traditionally been used in english education as a way of naming specific processes associated with reading literature in school. And it remains 'literature' -- rather than text -- since 'response' relies on a particular conception of text as 'literature'; works of assumed quality considered suitable for children. Many syllabus documents now use the term 'text' and stress the importance of students being introduced to a range of texts other than literature in english classrooms. But the term 'response' remains fixed alongside 'literature'. Response is what occurs when a child reads a novel by Katherine Paterson, a Roald Dahl short story or a poem by Bruce Dawe. Teachers do not expect their students to 'connect' with non-literary texts since these texts are assumed to be about the 'outer world' in contrast with literary texts which are assumed to be about the 'inner world'. Literary texts are understood to have a 'centre' which the student-reader is expected to reach and by that process develop a more mature sense of his or her inner-self, a more certain connection between thought and feeling. At the core of english -- the heart and moral centre of the curriculum -- resides the personal, individual and spontaneous response to literature. Termed in modern english tracts as the 'genuinely felt response' this particular essentialist concept of response continues to offer the long-sought possibility of the final completion of the individual reading subject through the perfect conjunction of thought and feeling. Britton's (1980) use of the term 'genuinely felt response' marks one point at which an attempt has been made to weld the historical split between thought and feeling, played out in other fields as an unreconcilable division between cognition and emotion (educational psychology) and between science and intuition (rhetoric). The 'vision of english' embodied in this ideal is

assumed by some historians (Baldick, 1983; Eagleton, 1983) to have been announced by Arnold at the end of the last century and pursued through the dual goals of the installation of literary critical studies at Oxford and the establishment of English at the core of the school curriculum. For them, the project of English was nothing short of the final completion of 'man' embodied in 'his' achievement of the perfect unity of thought and feeling. Traditional debates assume that this 'vision' has determined and accounts for the rise of English and its place in the school curriculum. The rhetoric of personal response pedagogy would appear to support this belief since it is within this field that the terms of the vision have come to be articulated in a way which suggests that the strategies and techniques imbricated in the practices of response offer the best means of achieving the long sought possibility of cultural completion. The concept of response as the unique expression of personal essence embodying the ultimate unity of thought and emotion has informed the writing and development of curriculum and pedagogical practices in English classrooms. Response imagery (the solitary child with book, bathed in the radiant glow of communing beings -- reader and author) is familiar and authoritative. But I intend to begin this discussion with three alternative propositions: first, that the emanating centre of response, 'inner-self', rather than representing the innate, individual state of the individual reader has been deployed as a specific strategy whereby the student-reader is expected to perform a certain representation of the 'self' thus making the terms of what Hunter (1988) describes as an 'aesthetico-ethical' transaction available for scrutiny and correction within the normalising practices of personal response pedagogy in secondary English classrooms. Second, it will be proposed here that the strategies and techniques of response pedagogy, ostensibly an invention of the sixties, have been available since the inception of popular education. Finally, it is proposed that personal response pedagogy, rather than constituting the field within which the child can achieve cultural completion has become, instead, the site of quite specific strategies for the surveillance and control of populations whose morals and values are the object of 'governmental' scrutiny and correction.

This chapter describes those historical contingencies which were attendant upon the installation of a particular set of strategies and techniques which operate within the field of modern English education, and which

together constitute what is here termed 'personal response pedagogy'. The examination of these contingencies is framed by a number of questions which do not assume a grounding of response in either an originating model of literary studies or in the mysterious depths of the individual student's inner-self. Rather, they emanate from an interest in describing specific sets of pedagogical capacities and effects (personal response) in terms of the practical deployment of 'technologies of the self' within a particular governmental system (popular education). It is anticipated that an analysis of personal response pedagogy in terms of the various histories of its deployment will indicate some of the ways in which it functions as the means by which the 'inner-self' of the student reader/writer can be

revealed, monitored and corrected within the parameters of a collaborative, non-coercive teacher-child relationship. These questions and interests set themselves against the traditional questions and interests of modern english pedagogy.

Personal response in the modern classroom

The traditional questions associated with personal response assume the informing myths of essence and of origin by locating the foundation of response first, in the feelings and experiences of the reader, and second, in a capacity to uncover the conditions which make the expression of those feelings and experiences possible. It may be useful at this stage to look at an example of a classroom activity which exemplifies particular assumptions regarding literary response pedagogy. The example is drawn from a paper by Joel Wingard (1990) which resulted from a Summer Institute on literature teaching held at Myrtle Beach, South Carolina in 1988. Wingard describes a pedagogical device, the 'response statement' which he has instituted in his literature classes:

Basic to the response statement ... is a heuristic that asks students the following: What was the initial effect of the text on you? How do you account for that effect, in terms of features of the text and qualities of yourself as a reader? What does your response tell you about yourself or your society? (p.153).

The emphases of response pedagogy are here exemplified through a clearly articulated focus on qualities of the self combined with self-knowledge, producing a certain type of writing recognisable as the 'response statement'. In order to produce the 'response' the student must perform a series of manoeuvres which allow the display of knowledge of the text in terms of its 'features' or literary conventions and a display of the self in terms of personal values. (p.153). It does not appear, however, that students are taught the specific conventions of such writing; rather, it is assumed that the task or questions make the demands of such writing self-evident.

In discussing what it is that these questions allow students to do, Wingard notes that they 'tend to be relaxed and natural in their writing, speaking in authentic voices' (p.154). While the question of what constitutes an 'authentic voice' or even 'natural writing' within this pedagogical practice remains to be addressed by advocates of this approach, consistent features of the response statements provided by Wingard include a willingness on the part of student-readers to discuss themselves in relation to the text using the traditional rhetoric of the first person, and the repetition of the students' uncertainties regarding the text's meaning; thus 'I was barely able to make sense of *The Birds* at all' (p.154) from one student and 'I found myself with nothing to grasp onto in hopes of creating some meaning' (p.156) from another. Both the response statements from which these excerpts are drawn are reproduced in Wingard's paper as exemplary pieces. An important aspect of the response statement is the degree to which it succeeds, in the opinion of the teacher, in demonstrating 'genuine' self-understanding arising from the strategies of response pedagogy. In the interests of meeting this demand one student comments, 'even if I am faced with an unconventional text that I do not understand I can react with frustration and allow myself to try to think of

the things about myself that are holding me back from comprehending' (p.155). Self-understanding emanates from a self-scrutiny which takes place as a result of the reader's experience of failure to understand the text. It is in these terms that the revelatory move of the response statement allows the student-reader/writer to lay bare the conditions of their

incomprehension and at the same time to make available (to the teacher) the terms of their self-scrutiny. As the Bullock report notes, 'In a very real sense a pupil is himself being judged each time he responds in class to a piece of literature, particularly a poem. More is at stake than his knowledge of the text' (p.131). Not only does the student perform the response by recounting the action of looking within but, in doing so, reveals the self as both limited and limiting, thus making it available for scrutiny and correction. The 'more' that is at stake is the risk involved in exposing the self to public scrutiny. But also the 'more' that is assumed to be offered by response pedagogy is enhanced knowledge of the self and of the text. The risk results in the reward as the student performs the healing manoeuvre of personal response, conjoining thought and feeling in specific ways.

The second example of the production of response statements in classroom settings comes from a lesson I observed in a high school english class in Western Australia in 1991. Following a class reading of Judith Wright's poem *Woman to Man* and a discussion that focused on the personal responses of students and teacher to the 'theme' of the poem, the teacher asked the students to write, by way of response, a poem on any topic they cared about 'deeply'. The task here was not to produce a response statement in the form of a self-narrative of the reading experience but to produce the response in the form of a poem. The teacher explained that the poem could be on any topic that, in his words, 'touches you in a personal sense ... something that is very important to you as an individual'. He went on to give some general directions about how to write a poem, assuming, as did his students, that the poem would take the form of a lyric. No discussion of 'appropriate' forms took place but, nevertheless, no student 'chose' to write a ballad or a limerick. The second feature of the class discussion preceding the writing activity was that the teacher did not provide any indication of suitable topics, indeed he stressed the point that this must be a matter of personal choice on the part of the students. Rose (1990) has shown the way in which, in terms of psychological discourses, 'the modern self is institutionally required to construct a life through the exercise of choice from among alternatives' (p.227). English education is beset by the contradictions inherent in the institutionalisation of free choice, whatever internal or external constraints may be in operation. The question of interest here is, given 'free choice' of any topic that they cared deeply about, how did these students know what topics constituted an inappropriate response? In writing a poem about rain-forests, love or loneliness (three topics which proved popular with this class) the students applied specific techniques for responding: they 'looked within' and wrote their poems in terms which reconstituted the appropriate object as an expression of personal feelings and experiences (the 'genuinely felt

response'). The activity of looking within becomes re-constituted as the response but the response cannot be produced unless the student already knows that it is constituted by the act of 'looking within' and that this activity is linked in important ways with particular objects (we do not, for instance, have to look within ourselves to find the derivation of a square root). Within this circularity, response produces itself as a description of what it is that makes it possible.

Histories of personal response

In an effort to examine some of the historical parameters of modern english pedagogy's preoccupation with personal response it is worth considering the re-emergence in 1968 of Louise Rosenblatt's text on literature teaching, *Literature as Exploration* which was first published in 1938. Rosenblatt proposed that the act of interpreting a text was as much a matter of personal exploration in terms of the readers' experiences of life and of texts as it was a matter of learning about texts, their conventions, histories, genres or the biographies of their writers. In 1968, *Literature as Exploration* emerged from almost three decades of silence and was so favourably received by teacher educators, teachers and sections of the reading research community that it has continued to be republished since the late sixties. The popular explanation for the resurgence of interest in Rosenblatt's work is that by the late sixties the ideas of reader-response literary critics posed a challenge to the dominance of New Criticism particularly within classrooms. At this point, Rosenblatt's work began to

be promoted extensively through teacher education courses and through the publications of the professional associations while it's re-emergence also co-incided with the publication of several texts written by literary critics on reader-response theory thus promoting its influence into the arena of reader-response research as well as pedagogy. So, most obviously, this text appeared to forge the necessary links between a progressive pedagogy and literary criticism.

Other explanations for the renewed interest in Rosenblatt's work are possible and they are explanations which have a particular bearing on the arguments proposed here. *Literature as Exploration* followed a well worn path in english studies by rejecting literary criticism's formalism as a basis for pedagogy and by insisting instead that literary study was about those connections between a reader and a text which must be established if the reader is to make the text his/her own. This approach to literature teaching fitted well within a sphere carved out by progressive educationalists of the late nineteenth century (such as Arnold, Stow and Kay-Shuttleworth). Hunter has shown the way in which particular subjects incorporated into the curriculum in the late nineteenth century 'functioned as a non-coercive means for bringing the "real life of the child" into the corrective space of the school' (p.115). Popular education's need for humanised pedagogical techniques was to be met through the development of pedagogical strategies which would allow children, but particularly working-class children, to have 'direct and empathetic access [to knowledge] simply by virtue of their sense and imagination' (p.115). Hunter's analysis of pedagogic responses to the problem of population

management is suggestive. Rather than a liberal-democratic response to the excesses of New Criticism, personal response pedagogy may be better understood as a result of the need to find alternative ways for engaging the attention and supervising the moral and ethical development of increasingly diversified secondary school populations.

By the mid-sixties secondary classroom teachers were under renewed pressure from a changing student population and needed alternative means for holding the interest of an increasing group of reluctant readers. The rapid changes in the composition of high school populations was a result of legislated increases in the number of years of compulsory education combined with the increasing expectation that secondary schools would improve retention rates beyond the age of compulsory schooling. The decade from 1962 to 1972 was a period of 'strong and consistent growth at all levels of post-compulsory education' (Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission: 1982, p.41). These factors, combined with changing immigration practices following World War II, resulted in a more diversified population in the secondary school. English was under more strain with regard to managing diverse populations than other subject areas since it remained, on the whole, the one compulsory course in secondary schools and therefore the one course which must incorporate the full range of retained students in an expanding system. Clearly, new techniques and strategies were required if all students irrespective of their cultural and social background were to benefit from the moral and ethical training. Alongside this concern, however, existed the more pragmatic issue of managing student behaviour in classrooms which contained non-traditional populations. The new pedagogical strategies had to meet specific demands in that they were expected to fulfil the needs of teachers in providing all students with the opportunity to participate in English. In this climate then it is not surprising that teachers looked towards the practices of psychology rather than to literary criticism for their pedagogical response.

In the interests of pursuing the proposition that personal response pedagogy has emerged as a result of classroom management pressures resulting from the increasing diversity of secondary school populations between the early sixties and the present, it is useful to turn to Hunter's (1988) example of the conjunction of psychology and English as exemplified through the work of J.A. Green. Green's advocacy, in 1913, of a pedagogical strategy which included the use of students' leisure reading material in English classrooms appears, to those who look to the 1960s, startlingly ahead of its time. But, like Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* the ideas outlined in Green's series of articles were not to be activated in secondary English classrooms until a much later date. In many respects,

both Green in 1913 and Rosenblatt in 1938 were observing the difficulties faced by classroom teachers who were intent on improving students' access to literary study. However, to hope for access and to fail to deliver it is a manageable if lamentable shortcoming. The problem facing teachers of a later era was less manageable; many students not only failed to achieve access to the civilising practices of literary study but they actively resisted the teachers' and the schools' attempts to persuade them that this

was a worthwhile undertaking. Managing student behaviour in classrooms has become an increasingly urgent issue from the sixties to the present. The comprehensive school movement and increasingly diverse school populations meant that the majority of secondary school teachers encountered, for the first time, students whose expectations, needs and interests varied greatly from group to group and from those of traditional high school populations. Teaching in large comprehensive secondary schools in the major cities of Britain, North America and Australia required different strategies and procedures from those of the past. Teachers looked with increasing interest towards psychology as a means of making their own working lives in classrooms manageable on a day-to-day basis. Personal response pedagogy and its attendant techniques can be argued to have emerged largely as a result of the need to control students through enhanced methods of observation and correction. This project was attended by the familiar rhetoric of moral and cultural regeneration. Just as Green could refer in 1913 to the English teacher's ultimate objective as being 'saving souls' and talk about the need for 'genuine literary feeling' while at the same time imposing surveillant measures on working-class children and advocating the appropriation of their leisure reading material for classroom study, so too can modern day English educators advocate the 'cherishing of private souls' and the production of the 'genuinely felt response' while exhorting students to reveal their 'inner selves' with all their short-comings and self-doubts to the gaze of a teacher who occupies the ambivalent positions of friend-confidant and judge-examiner.

By the early seventies the documents of English education renewed their insistence on a specific rhetoric of response as the public expression of personal experience enriched by the action of looking within the self. This expression of personal experience became the chief vehicle by which the desires, confusions and self-doubts of the students could be offered for sympathetic scrutiny. English, in adopting these forms aligned itself more closely with psychology than with a traditional conception of literary criticism and, as Hunter notes (p.110), the indications of this alignment appear at an early stage in the emergence of English. Fairchild, writing in 1931, devotes an entire section to 'personal response' and in many respects the treatment and discussion of it found here would not appear out of place in a current text on literary study. Fairchild comments, for instance, that the 'mere reproduction of ... outlines or summaries is useful only as a test of analytical ability and memory' and proceeds to pose a series of rhetorical questions which bear many similarities to those posed in contemporary tracts: 'What can you do with what you know? Have you really made it a part of you?' (p.29). The principle of traditional literary criticism, detached textual analysis, is here rejected in favour of a 'personal reading'. The strategies for bringing these about are also similar to those advocated today. Fairchild suggests that students should read aloud in private or listen to dramatised readings, discuss the texts informally with friends, write personal responses to particular texts or write creatively in response to a story or poem by producing their own story or poem. Although all of the strategies advocated by Fairchild were to become an accepted part of literary study in secondary schools, this was not to occur widely for several decades. Just as J.A. Green's suggestion

that popular literature be introduced in the classroom appeared to be inspired by his observation of 'the reading interest of working children, carried out through the network of Evening Schools' (Hunter, 1988, p.110) so, too, was Fairchild interested in the advancement of learning for groups outside the major educational institutions. Fairchild expresses the hope that the book 'may play some part in the great movement of adult education' and goes on to claim that 'every paragraph of the book has its application to the needs and interest of the man or woman who, without personal academic guidance, is seeking a larger share of happiness through

literature' (p.vi). The early history of the development of the specific techniques and strategies which were to emerge as a part of personal response pedagogy in the latter half the twentieth century were attended by an interest in the education of specific groups of students; working-class people and their children. These strategies were deemed to work best with students who were relatively new occupiers of educational spaces beyond the elementary school in the first decades of the twentieth century.

It is in these terms and within the boundaries of popular education that personal response emerged within specific pedagogical formations as a self-shaping set of strategies and techniques. This is not to suggest that response pedagogy, finding itself in a position to monitor the moral development of students through the close scrutiny of their writing about literature, devised the category 'inner-self' as a location for the development of personal moralities. Rather, the category 'inner-self' was already available in specific forms which were enlisted in what appeared to be a more generalised project of cultural regeneration. Arnold, writing in the late nineteenth century argued in favour of a programme of literature study through which the private and emotional spheres of 'self' could be enriched and articulated. Similarly, George Hill could begin his celebrated lecture to teachers delivered at Oxford during the Long Vacation of 1891 by examining 'the part which the study of literature should play in education', namely its contribution to the maintenance of the 'great reward' of nineteenth century life, 'the inner life nobly lived' (p.143). But the noble enrichment of the inner life was not viewed as an effect of culture; rather, it was to be achieved through the application of particular pedagogical strategies.

What was required of the child-reader in elementary schools was not an extensive knowledge of literature or even a wide range of experience with great literary texts; what was required, instead, was a 'proper sensitivity' to literary works and a potential for understanding the great insights of the masters. By the early twentieth century it was assumed that even the children of the working class could possess these attributes, since 'it is in life itself that we have to seek the sources of literature' (Hudson: 1913, p.11). 'Life itself' constituted by a recognition of the connections between personal experiences and emotions and those 'made available' through the text was all that was required for the child-reader to manifest a proper sensitivity to the literary work. It was the role of the teacher to foster this access and to nurture its articulation through the application of pedagogical techniques designed to foster confidence in

the validity of personal experiences. 'We want first of all to become,' as Hudson noted in 1913, 'not scholars, but good readers ' (p.17) and we can read here 'not literary critics but sensitive people attuned to the life forces of the text'. Children could become 'good readers' by manifesting a willingness to reveal the inner life of self and text rather than by analysis and scholarship. Hudson's comments are important for it is here in this very popular book that he makes the case against literary criticism as a basis for the study of literature claiming that the study of literature properly conceived through his book 'is as far as possible removed both from academic formalism and from the dilettante trifling, with one or other of which it has, in popular thought, been too often associated.' (p.10). He goes on to claim that

'it is important to understand, to begin with, that literature lives by virtue of the life which it embodies. By remembering this, we shall be saved from the besetting danger of confounding the study of literature with the study of philology, rhetoric, and even literary technique' (p.11).

Hudson's book resulted from a course of lectures delivered before University Extension audiences at Technical Institutes and Polytechnics. Like Fairchild and others he was, in the first instance, concerned with the literary education of working people. The pedagogical techniques devised by these educators were those best calculated to grant access to a broad range of students; these techniques included such apparently contemporary innovations as group discussions, self-reflective writing and the 'expression of personal response' (Fairchild, 1929), and the employment of personal 'contracts' through which students could individually tailor their study of a particular 'unit' by selecting from a range of options the work which he or she would undertake (Smith, 1935).

Increasingly, the directives regarding literary education were accompanied by disclaimers regarding the worth or usefulness of literary criticism in the project of popular schooling. To this end, many writers of texts on literature teaching began by insisting that 'although [literary] appreciation is our goal there is (1) no direct method of teaching it and (2) no practical means of testing it' (Smith, 1935, p.6). This observation leads directly into the concerns of the next sections of this chapter, namely, the role of the teacher in response pedagogy and the problems attendant upon a project which sought to integrate an individualist, intuitive practice (personal response) into a competitive, normalising technology (popular education).

The teacher

Several influential reports on the teaching of English have been released this century, most notably those chaired by Sir Henry Newbolt (1926) and by Sir Alan Bullock (1975). Both reports, although released fifty years apart, share a common view of the English teacher's role and attributes. The Newbolt Report draws attention to what is perceived to be a unique province of literary studies by claiming that 'to convey anything of the feeling and thought which are the life of literature the teacher must have been touched by them himself'(p.11). In many respects this view of the successful English teacher as being one who has been 'touched' by the

'life' of literature is familiar to modern educators. No other subject area requires such transformations on the part of the teacher. To be 'in touch' with literature is a major pre-requisite to becoming a successful teacher, more important, for instance, than a specialist training in what has been considered by some historians of English as the foundational discipline; literary criticism. However, the pioneers of popular education did not consider that the subject had to be taught by an English 'specialist', and neither the Newbolt Report nor the Bullock Report advocates such a training. Literary studies (with an emphasis on literary criticism) could, in effect, be a disadvantage since a training in literary criticism was not considered to be particularly relevant to the study of literature in schools. The danger with this type of training was that it could disrupt the necessary processes by which a person comes 'sincerely' and 'genuinely' to appreciate literature. The teacher must be on guard not to interfere with the developing sensitivities of the child but rather to nurture these as a gardener might tend the delicate plants within his or her care. All the teacher can do, notes Smith (1935), 'is clear the ground, enrich it, sow the seed, fight weeds and grass - and hope for the best' (p.7). Quite obviously, a training in literary criticism is not necessary for this process to take place; what was considered necessary however, was a proper sensitivity on the part of the teacher to the 'life' of literature and its relationship to the life of the child.

By the time the Bullock Report was released, however, it was accepted that the secondary English teacher could have a degree in literature and it is perhaps for this reason that Bullock is so clear on the need for the teacher to be on guard against his knowledge of literature:

The teacher has a deeper knowledge of literature in general and that work in particular than his pupils can possess. He brings to the situation a wider experience of life and a maturer view of it. To contain these in the process of sharing is a measure of his skill at its highest level. A child derives value from a work of literature in direct proportion to the genuineness of the response he is able to make to it. The teacher's skill lies in developing the subtlety and complexity of this response without catechism or a one-way traffic in apodictic judgments. (Bullock, 1975, p. 134).

Although the practice of advising the teacher to 'contain' his knowledge of the subject matter may appear somewhat contradictory in some educational circles, the view of what type of teacher is envisaged is clear enough. This is the teacher-counsellor, the collaborative explorer of literature who is sensitively attuned to the needs of her or his students; fostering the genuine response by giving advice while not dictating direction. The teacher who, despite the apparent contradiction, teaches without intervening in the naturally developing processes of response. It is not the role of English teachers to impart knowledge of a subject area, what they must endeavour to do is 'share' a part of their knowledge with the

students in a manner best calculated to encourage the 'development' of the child's 'own' response.

It is here that the attributes of the popular school teacher which were

announced by the pioneers of popular education (particularly Kay-Shuttleworth and Stow) are re-articulated one hundred years later in the Bullock Report as the particular attributes of the English teacher. The circuitous route by which the pedagogical techniques necessary for the establishment of a new supervisory, governmental system became located in English have been extensively detailed by Hunter (1988). What is of interest for the arguments being advanced in this chapter, however, are the ways in which the increasing refinement of surveillance strategies has taken shape within the field of personal response pedagogies. The trademarks of modern English pedagogy, 'self discovery' and 'individual growth' were installed at an early date through the mechanism of a particular relationship between teacher and student, the terms of which had already been articulated by the mid-nineteenth century by the constructors of popular education. Hunter describes the ways in which 'the disinterested ethical demeanour of the critic would be married to the non-coercive moral observation of the teacher' (p.132) within the field of English thus constructing a figure of a particular type; one who combined the attributes of the nineteenth century 'man of letters' with the supervisory functions of the popular school teacher, the figure of the 'teacher-critic' (p.111). The teacher-critic became the focus for the development of new pedagogical techniques for supervising the freedom of the child and for establishing a new kind of relationship between child and teacher; one which would facilitate an environment in which the child could (or must) exercise free choice under the sympathetic gaze of the teacher. It was in just such a relationship that personal response pedagogy emerged as a means of focusing the apparently contradictory techniques of an individualised cultivation of the 'self' and the normalisation of personal desires and values. However, the deployment of these particular techniques within the field of personal response pedagogy was accompanied, as the century progressed, by an explicitly articulated view of the teacher as counsellor rather than critic. The Bullock Report contains many examples of the relationship between a particular view of the teacher as both the facilitator of free expression and judge of moral development and the student's production of personal response. It is worth quoting the Report at length since it is here that the competing technologies of cultural completion through a perfect conjunction of thought and feeling, and the practices of modern psychology are most visible.

In a very real sense a pupil is himself being judged each time he responds in class to a piece of literature, particularly a poem. More is at stake than his knowledge of the text. Is the value-judgment he forms the one the teacher finds acceptable? Is he betraying himself, he may well ask, as one who lacks discrimination? In no other area of classroom operations is there quite the same degree of vulnerability, with poetry the most exposing element of all. Every skilled teacher has his own means of reducing the vulnerability, of balancing the need to explore the text with the need to preserve its appeal. Some of the most successful lessons we have seen have been those in which the teacher has contrived to stand alongside his pupils in this process of exploration. (Bullock, 1975, p.131).

Expressed here is a particular view of the child's need, by virtue of 'his' vulnerability, of the sensitive attention of his teacher. The teacher must

act not as a guide, ahead of the child so to speak, but as a fellow-traveller, alongside the pupil, metaphorically reducing the distance between the 'counsellor' and the 'confessor'. It is by these means that the skilled teacher can provide a less threatening environment for the work of literary education, work which must necessarily proceed in a space which offers both personal risks and personal freedoms.

The emergence of the the London School, a group largely based at the London Institute of Education and including such well known english educators and writers as Barnes, Britton, Dixon, Martin, Meek and the Rosens was a decisive force in the construction of this type of teacher in the contemporary english classroom. The work of the London School centred during the 1960s and 1970s on the promotion of english as a technique for 'personal growth' understood to be a challenge and departure from the

elitism of Leavisism and the formalism of New Criticism. Although King (1987) demonstrates that the strategies of 'personal growth' english were not new innovations, the figure of the teacher as conceived by this group is of interest here. Dixon (1991), in quoting advice given to teachers in the 1960s draws attention to the characteristics of this teacher: she should be someone who could 'encourage [students] to write their own poems and stories: to draw on experiences and dreams ... to think about family, youth and age' (p.13). Within the parameters of the New English the teacher was not assumed to be a critic of response (in terms of formal assessment procedures) but to be a sympathetic facilitator of it; a mentor with a specific relationship to the child in terms of the development of a response in which feelings, emotions and a sense of trust were privileged: 'in school, particularly with the younger adolescent, the teacher must play the role above all of receiver, of sympathetic reader. A large part of the incentive for the writer lies in the sharing ' (Britton, 1980, p.253). Bullock notes in a similar vein 'We must seriously question what is being achieved when pupils are producing chapter summaries in sequence, taking endless notes to prepare model answers and writing stereotyped commentaries which carry no hint of a felt response' (p.131). The teacher-councilor's role as promoted through the work of the London School is to develop a certain kind of teacher-child relationship in order to facilitate the production of a genuinely felt response. This response must exhibit particular characteristics of personality; sincerity, emotion and personal voice before it can count as both 'genuine' and 'felt'.

However, personal response pedagogy's expectation of a self-revelatory response statement is contradicted, in many respects, by the opposing demands of competitive school assessment procedures which eschew the personal. These procedures, while often incorporating the rhetoric of personal response pedagogy in the wording of particular examination questions, (Mares, 1988) nevertheless expect the student to demonstrate the successful application of specific reading techniques incorporating textual analysis, logical argument, synthesis and critique (Secondary Education Authority, 1989). This tension is expressed through the complaints of english teachers that students often resist the strategies of response pedagogy, strategies such as small group discussions and the writing of

journal entries in response to particular texts (Phelan, 1990). Rather than engage in the self-exploratory work of response pedagogy students demand to know what it is they will have to write in examinations to achieve the 'score' necessary for securing a place in a tertiary institution. What tends to be argued by personal response teachers is that it is only through the thorough exploration of literature made possible by the techniques of personal response pedagogy and resulting in the production of the personal, genuine, sincere response to the text that a more correct and coherent (normative) reading of the text can be produced for examination purposes. This line of argument, however, depends for success upon a number of assumptions regarding the 'inner life' of the child and the 'experiential nature' of literature.

Formal assessment and personal response

A particular version of response pedagogy begins with the assumption that meaningful aspects of experience are created and reside in a space which is both outside language and within the consciousness of the individual. The assumption that response is produced from within autonomous individuals acting in creative and spontaneous ways is a view still widely supported by syllabus development and examination practices. The pedagogical construction of response is acknowledged only to the extent of claiming that the teacher must facilitate this inner-process of meaning retrieval and recreation for the individual reader; that the teacher must act as guide and mentor helping the student to express what it is he or she genuinely feels about the text. What the teacher-counsellor cannot do is teach the means by which the 'genuine feelings' are produced since only the student can do this by drawing on the reserves of the inner-self. If these are inadequate in some way then there is nothing the teacher can do apart from encourage the child to look more deeply within him or herself. However, since the process of 'looking within' is a specific technique located within a particular pedagogical formation then the child who is unaware of these criteria will presumably be unable to accomplish the

required manoeuvre. What the teacher must do is to teach the strategies necessary for reproducing the markers of the genuinely felt response in a way which suggests that the response emanates from the child's inner-being and is not the result of his or her mastery of a particular set of techniques and strategies. It appears, then, that the post-Bullock teacher is located in contradictory ways by competing models of reading in which students' responses are paradoxically considered to be both spontaneously and intuitively produced from within the student and taught specifically in the classroom.

Much of the work on reading and response has been diverted into a preoccupation with the ways in which individual readers make meaning from texts in a personal sense while setting aside the conflicting terms of a competitive examination system. If response is the genuine and sincere expression of the individual child's inner-self then, so the argument goes, it is presumptuous of teachers to stand as judges of this. In addition, the assessment of personal response places the teacher in a position of obvious power which jeopardises the establishment of the role of friend and

confidant. The student reader's unique perception of the text is assumed to dominate the response in the sense that the 'felt response' must necessarily exceed the 'expressed response' (Britton; 1970); that is, the publicly voiced response can only ever be an imperfect version of the original, felt response. The aim of teachers and student readers is to close the gap between the two as much as possible while, of course, still allowing a space in which the mystery of the inner-self can be maintained. Because the 'inner being' of the child is conceptualised as the individual component of a universal human essence and the genuinely felt response is considered to be as near a perfect expression of that essence as possible then it became important to develop ways to argue against a system which demanded public accountability of response. Britton attempted to do this by constructing these two categories for response; the genuinely 'felt' response and the publicly 'expressed' response. Within the framework of this 'theorisation' it became feasible to defend the existence of a necessary distance between the 'felt' response and the 'expressed' response, thus keeping the inner life of the child safe from the invasive procedures of examinations.

Britton's *Language and Learning* (1970), arguably the most influential single publication on teaching english in Australia during the past two decades relies extensively on the work of psychologists, Vygotsky and Harding. The location of much of the London School's work in particular psychological discourses resulted in pedagogical practices which reinforced notions of an authorising inner self expressed, in a series of developmental stages, through language. Teachers and researchers were propelled by many of the post-Dartmouth publications towards a consideration of the individual, personal aspects of language and away from examining english pedagogy as a particular formation located in specific histories and governed by intersecting sets of strategies and techniques for reading and writing. In pedagogical practices which assume that the individual creates meanings which are expressed through a reflective language, the question of the terms of that 'creation' only arises in conjunction with a search for authenticating versions of the self.

Conclusion

Reading response research has served a dual purpose during the past two decades. First: it provided english pedagogy with evidence of what teachers of english had assumed since Dartmouth: that readers contribute, in a highly personalised sense, to the meaning of a text. Second: it has suggested various strategies for avoiding the possibility of a plethora of idiosyncratic response which, it could be argued by enemies of personal response pedagogy, must be the inevitable result of this approach.

Idiosyncratic or individualistic readings of written texts tend to lack persuasiveness particularly in classrooms where the final goal of literary studies is evaluation and accreditation and where individual student readers have little status and few rights in terms of institutional power hierarchies. Since it is rare for books on teaching literature through personal response techniques to ever mention examinations this remains a problem for teachers who are committed to providing reader-response positions for students.

The tensions visible here between the rhetoric of a free and individual personal response and the institutional procedures of response evaluation serve as a reminder of the paradoxes governing modern English education. The reader's relationship to social power hierarchies is, in effect, a key factor in the construction and promotion of influential meanings. Students' perceptions of their lack of autonomy when it comes to producing readings of literature within the classroom have been well documented in recent reports of classroom observations (Hynds, 1985; Mares, 1988; Gilbert, 1989). This contradicts a central goal of response pedagogy which is to help the adolescent 'to become himself: to make important choices about himself and his work and his relationships . . . ' (Britton, 1980, p. 272). Students must evaluate themselves in terms of the criteria provided by personal response pedagogy but these are presented to them in terms of individual choice, personal voice and freedom to be themselves. The effect of this in pedagogical/research terms is to locate the focus of attention on the individual child and the reasons and repercussions of his or her personal choices rather than to examine the historically different deployment of pedagogical strategies and techniques organised by the apparatus of English education.

The effects of this focus on the individual either as a reflection of human 'essence' or a reflection of 'culture' are nowhere more evident than in the challenges to personal response pedagogies issued during the mid-eighties. The terms of these challenges differed little from those mounted on behalf of personal response pedagogy against New Critical techniques in the mid-sixties in the sense that these attacks were informed by precisely the same sets of ideals which govern the current attempts by 'genre' theorists and 'post-structuralists' in Australia to disrupt 'holistic' approaches to language education (including personal response pedagogy). These challenges were mounted on behalf of particular sets of ideals focused by the term 'educational equity'. Attention to the relationships between the race, sex, and social class of student readers and the production of personal responses has resulted in an examination of the ways in which student readers become the 'subjects' of particular pedagogical discourses. The relative locations of power which are assumed to be effects of this subjectivisation impinge upon the ways in which groups of student readers construct responses to specific texts, and what happens to those responses. The status of the response statement as the necessarily incomplete material realisation of the 'genuinely felt response' has been destabilised by the increasing relocation of the statements within theoretical formations governed by some of the technologies of critical pedagogies: cultural studies; media studies; Marxist structuralisms; feminist post-structuralisms. These re-readings of response are often located in paradoxical ways through 'reflection theory' assuming as they do that the 'meaning' of response is located in the reading/reader context rather than within the individual 'self'. Nevertheless, these challenges do serve to disrupt the totalising assumptions regarding the connections between response and an essential self. Gilbert's work, for instance, has been instrumental in this regard. She argues in her (1989) analysis of classroom writing practices that writing in English classes values 'self expression'

and 'personal creativity' as a means for fostering the development or growth of individual consciousness whilst also acknowledging the inability of the written word to fully reflect the essential self or the creative essence. Gilbert concludes (1990) that English classrooms operate specific pedagogical practices which foster an acquiescence by girls in systems of subordination by prioritising the individualistic expression of an original self that is assumed to exist apart from the available formations of femininity. Within this practice the response statement remains ungendered; a universalised statement of a human position.

These challenges to personal response pedagogy, despite their limited base in 'reflection theory' have made it possible to think about response as a 'practice' rather than a 'nature'. It is not common to consider personal response as a school practice since, traditionally, it is not conceptualised as either a pedagogic or a school practice but rather as an innate, spontaneous and individual expression of a reader's unique experience of a text. Whilst it is argued that the expression of response, the form of the actual response statement can be taught, it is nevertheless

assumed that the source of that expression, 'the feeling centre' or the 'origin' of response cannot be taught since it is a function of the inner-being. Although it cannot be taught it is nevertheless, judged, assessed and monitored; children are sorted, streamed, or tracked into various English classes on the basis of how well or how poorly they 'respond' to literature. Further, their literary response acts as a data bank from which teachers can read-off the social, economic and intellectual background of the child. Reading literary texts in schools is about feelings, emotions, personal experience, involvement, empathy, appreciation. Eagleton's (1985) joking request to be allowed to rehearse some of the cherished terms of 'the moral technology of literature studies' -- 'sensitive, imaginative, responsive, sympathetic, creative, perceptive, reflective' -- omits the reverse of the dichotomy, the silent partners in a system of oppressive oppositions which constructs the meanings of response evaluation. Students whose performance is judged as inadequate when measured in terms of these cherished criteria are assumed to be insensitive, unimaginative, unresponsive, unsympathetic, or at the very least, unawakened. These failings, viewed in the main as the result of personal deficiencies are located within the race, social class and gender specificities of achievement in English. A major reason for reading and listening to 'expressed response' is to evaluate it not only in terms of the language skills of the writer/speaker but in terms of individual sensitivities; it provides teachers with a measure of the depth of the inner being of the individual child. One effect of this strategy is a conception of the student reader/writer as 'an autonomous and rational individual who is class and gender neutral, while at the same time ensuring that these categories assume a built-in deviance, a problem to be dealt with and corrected.' (Walkerdine, 1985, p. 207). Response is evaluated in terms of the perceived match between the reader's connection of her/his inner-self with that of the author, and expressed through the surface versus depth vocabulary of response pedagogy: penetrating/obtuse;

insightful/superficial; deep understanding/skims the surface. The teacher remains caught between competing practices of response: on the one hand he or, more commonly, she must facilitate the development and expression of the genuine felt response, a facilitation which is never acknowledged to be part of an authorised (and normalised) reading strategy, while on the other hand she must monitor, correct and evaluate this response in terms of normative practices of assessment.

The response statement (not for formal assessment) functions as the material expression of the student-reader's inner-self and provides the means by which the student is nurtured/scrutinised, cherished/corrected and guided/reconstructed through a constant process of revelation and examination. This practice of response assumes a number of features which the publication of Hunter's (1988) 'genealogy' of modern literary education has made it possible to discuss beyond the terms of the usual debates. Hunter proposes that it was in and through the machinery of literary education that individuals as members of a 'population whose health, literacy, criminal tendencies, private sentiments and public conduct [were] constituted as objects of a new kind of government attention' (p.ix). I have argued here that one of the major vehicles of this moral supervision and governance of, in particular, the 'private sentiments and public conduct' of students is 'personal response' pedagogy in the English classroom. This particular mechanism provides the means by which students are positioned to publicise their 'experience' of literature, to make it available to the gaze of the teacher-counsellor thus reconstituting the 'inner life' as object of that gaze, subject to the monitoring procedures of surveillance despite the rhetoric of a collaborative, non-judgemental pedagogy.

Perhaps every project is attendant upon some utopian ideal and genealogies are no exception. It is in the processes of selecting, recording and constructing the details of particular practices that the ideals return. We do not 'assemble reminders' in a space apart from political formations but rather, reminders are assembled within the constraints of specific technologies. In this sense then, this discussion of personal response in English teaching is an effect of the deployment of particular sets of techniques and strategies available at the present time. I have argued that

within modern English pedagogical practices personal response has traditionally been assumed to be the mechanism by which the child could achieve the final project of English; the longed-for possibility of the perfect conjunction between thought and feeling captured and expressed through 'the genuinely felt response'. An alternative possibility demonstrated here is that 'personal response', rather than fulfilling a particular vision of English, has become an ancillary to a wider project of moral supervision, one that has been necessitated by the problems of governing an increasingly diversified school population, a diversity which is itself attendant upon changes in school retention rates, the comprehensive school movement and post-war immigration policies. A response statement which is assumed to reflect the depth of inner feelings for and about literary texts provides the teacher-counsellor with the necessary

window on the soul of the writer and the means by which the child-reader can be assessed and counselled in terms of a certain vision of a utopian ideal. At the same time, there exists the knowledge of the impossibility of this dream; knowledge which is necessary for the maintenance of the ideal. The teacher-counsellor, sustained by the rhetoric of personal growth and the possibility of the 'complete' response statement also has access to a mechanism for assessing the aesthetic and ethical progress of her charges. It is in these terms that personal response pedagogy provides the space within which the pedagogical procedures of a non-authoritarian technology can be employed in the interests of a comprehensive system for surveillance and correction.

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throughout the project.

See M. Torbe (1984) for an exemplary instance of these assumptions.

From Foucault (1988)

For evidence of the persistence of these 'traditional' research questions
and interests see Hayhoe & Parker (1990) and successive issues over the
past decade of the journal *Researching the Teaching of English*.

By 1976 Literature as Exploration appeared on the recommended reading list
of English education courses in most states in Australia. It did not appear
on course lists between its first publication in 1938 and the publication
of the revised edition in 1968.

The National Council for Teachers of English recently re-confirmed the
contribution of Rosenblatt's work through the publication of *Transactions
with Literature: A Fifty-Year Perspective* dedicated to Louise M.
Rosenblatt.

This expectation is still an important factor in educational policy making
in Australia. During the seventies the stated aim of policy makers was to
increase the retention rates for all students but particularly for female
students, who until the mid-seventies were considered to be substantially
under-represented in Universities (see Anderson and Vervoorn, 1983).
However, alongside the policy moves for inclusive education for girls and
women were other moves towards increasing the participation of working
class children in University education by increasing the retention rates of
these groups (working class children and girls) in the high schools (see
Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, 1982).

The increasing diversity of secondary school populations was a direct

result of the continuing expansion of a specific governmental system: popular education was extended through continuing political pressure to increase retention rates at the upper secondary school level (e.g. between 1982 and 1986 high school retention rates increased by 28 per cent. Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission: Review of efficiency and effectiveness in higher education, 1986, p.92) and through economic factors such as changing employment and social services conditions (see Smart & Dudley, 1990).

Hudson's book *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*, first published in 1911 in a competitive market (see Preface) was reissued in a second, enlarged edition only two years later.

The literary education of secondary school English teachers varies greatly and depends on whether the teacher has undertaken a general course in education to which English has been added (such as those courses offered in teacher training colleges) or whether they have taken the now more common path of an Arts degree with a major in literature followed by a relatively short post-graduate course in teacher training. At present in Western Australia at least there is still no necessity for a teacher to be a literature graduate or an English major in order to work as a teacher of English.

For a full account of this see Hunter, 1988, Chapter 2.

'Dartmouth' refers to a 'landmark' conference on English teaching held at Dartmouth in 1966. See Dixon (1978) for a celebrated account of the conference.

Most notably the work of Bleich (1978), Fish (1980), Holland (1968), Iser (1974, 1979) and Rosenblatt (1978).

I include my doctoral dissertation within these broad categories as constituting an attempt to challenge personal response pedagogies on behalf of educational equity. In doing this I approximated the terms of the challenges which personal response pedagogy had mounted against New

Criticism in the late sixties: that challenge was informed by the discourses of social class equity while mine was informed by the discourses of gender equity but the ideals remained the same. This is not to dismiss this type of work but rather to draw attention to the repetition of historical contingencies.

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of the relationships between reflection theory and educational research which assume 'culturalist/constructivist' perspectives. See Hunter (1985) for an account of reflection theory and literary criticism.

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