

Paradigms in the teaching and learning of literature

Abstract

Rosenblatt (1938: 24) claimed that when it comes to reading a literary text “there is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work.” She argued that “no one can read a poem for us. If there is indeed to be a poem and not simply a literal statement, the reader must have the experience, must ‘live through’ what is being created during the reading.” (1938: 33) She asserted that when a reader reads a literary text in search for factual information than he would adopt the ‘efferent stance.’ This stance which originates from a Latin word ‘effere’ means ‘to carry away.’ It is ‘predominantly nonliterary’ and is also used to assist a reader in making sense of a literary text based on its ‘public meaning’ (Rosenblatt, 1938: 292). Apart from that, it would normally be adopted when a reader chooses to read a literary text “primarily for the information provided” (Beach, 1993: 163). On the other hand, when reading a literary text, the reader may also choose to adopt the ‘aesthetic stance’ that would enable him to engage himself in a more personal meaning making level. Meanwhile, the aesthetic stance would permit focus on ‘private meaning making’ of the text. This is when the reader would be able to live through the meaning making process by relating it to personal associations, feelings and ideas.

To her it is possible for a reader to choose the efferent or aesthetic stance or to employ both interchangeably as one reads a literary text. However, she believed that it would be possible to ask anyone to read the newspaper or any academic text and to summarize or rephrase the original text into something more comprehensible for the layman to understand. In fact, she asserted that if the same text is summarized by different readers, then all the summaries would generally contain similar information that has been lifted or taken from the original text read. To extend this concept of information transfer into literary text, she believed that when a reader decides to adopt the efferent stance in reading a literary text, he would be reading in search for the overall idea of what the text is all about or in search for specific information which he may be able to use in describing his understanding of the plot, for example, in a summary. The situation is however different when the reader chooses to adopt the aesthetic stance in reading a literary text. Every transaction that takes place between the reader and the literary text will be unique. In other words, the same reader may enter a lived through experience differently each time he reads the text and this may be due to the state of mind that he is in, purpose of reading or even the time of

the day that the reading activity is done. The circumstance described so far is one of the factors that have instigated complex issues that surround the literature instruction and how it is generally viewed and taught across different curricula. For that matter, the following section will elaborate on three fundamental factors that have influenced the shaping of paradigms within the teaching and learning of literature for a very long time. The exploration and discovery of these fundamental factors would generate a deeper understanding of challenges that have become apparent as a consequence.