READER-RESPONSE APPROACHES TO LITERATURE TEACHING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN OBE ENVIRONMENT

Submitted as a thesis by Charles Gerard van Renen to the University of Port Elizabeth in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the Faculty of Education.

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I certify that all material contained in this thesis that is not my own work has been identified.

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ABSTRACT

This research is based on the hypothesis that response-based approaches to teaching literature and an outcomes-based system of education (OBE) are conceptually incompatible. This thesis claims that reader response involves processes that cannot be accommodated pedagogically within a system based on pre-determined outcomes. Furthermore, the kind of assessment prescribed by OBE is inappropriate to the nature of reader response.

The hypothesis is based on three main premises. The first is that each reader brings a highly individual and complex set of personal schemata to the reading of imaginative texts, and these schemata have a decisive influence on the nature of a reader’s response. This means that response during imaginative engagements with literary texts tends to be idiosyncratic, and therefore largely unpredictable. Because of this, it would be inappropriate for a teacher, working within an OBE system, to try to teach towards pre-selected outcomes and to attempt to ensure that these outcomes, based on responses to literary texts, are in fact achieved.

The second premise is that readers’ imaginative engagements with literary texts are essentially hidden events, which even the individual reader cannot fully bring to the surface and articulate. Because they are complex, and to some extent inaccessible, it would be inappropriate to assess the processes of response in the form of tangible evidence that a particular kind of response has taken place, or an outcome achieved. The third premise is that responses need time to grow and develop and do not merely happen quickly and cleanly. Consequently, aesthetic response, already a complex and inaccessible process, has no clearly distinguishable beginnings or endings. It would therefore be inappropriate to try to pinpoint the exact nature and parameters of a particular response or fragment it into a discrete unit of competence or knowledge.

A two-dimensional problem emerges. The first is a conceptual one: whether there is an inherent tension between encouraging response to imaginative literature on the one hand, and accepting the rationale for OBE, on the other. The second
dimension of the problem is empirical: whether teachers of literature experience any tension of either a conceptual or a practical nature when following response-based approaches within the OBE system of Curriculum 2005, and if so, what they do in order to cope.

In exploring the conceptual problem, the argument of this thesis is supported by reception theory and reader response criticism. The former provides key theoretical principles and insights that illuminate the nature of aesthetic reading, while the latter describes and analyses the nature, extent and manifestations of response in educational contexts, underpinned by both reception theory and empirical research. Together they offer evidence that personal response is determined by a complex range of processes, and is the core activity in reading for aesthetic purposes. This thesis also examines the conceptual basis and the structure of OBE as interpreted in both Curriculum 2005 and the revised National Curriculum Statement. The purpose of this is to establish the extent to which the philosophy and modus operandi of these curricula are rooted in notions of competence, and the requirement that learners give tangible demonstrations of pre-determined outcomes being achieved. If it is found that the curricula do lean heavily on pre-determined outcomes in regard to competencies that must be demonstrated, it may be concluded that 1) reader response activities are incompatible with OBE in a South African context, and 2) the potential exists for such incompatibility to create obstacles to creative and effective literature teaching. This can lead to difficulties for the teacher, who will then have to adopt acceptable strategies to cope with the situation. These strategies may ultimately be to the detriment of the pupils, particularly if the teacher seeks a compromise between genuine response and the kinds of activities that would yield precise, palpable measures of attainment that can be easily demonstrated.

Exploring the empirical dimension of the problem involves investigating the responses of both teachers and teacher trainers to the experience of promoting response-based literature teaching and learning in an OBE environment. In order
for the empirical and conceptual dimensions to be brought closer together, it is
firstly investigated whether the practitioners do encourage reading response as a
core activity in reading for aesthetic purposes. The extent to which practitioners
have a sound grasp of the conceptual issues relevant to this research is also
investigated. Insight into such issues depends on teachers and teacher trainers
understanding the nature of reader response, on the one hand, and the rationale
and structures of the relevant OBE curricula, on the other. Whether, and to what
extent, practitioners experience tensions through their awareness of conceptual
incompatibilities is also investigated.

It should be borne in mind that practitioners work in real contexts in which a
variety of complex factors play a role in determining how they respond to
pressures from the environment. It cannot therefore be expected that teachers
and others involved in delivering the curriculum will be able to reflect on purely
conceptual issues without being influenced to an extent by more practical or
logistical considerations. However, this study argues that the extent to which they
are able to identify the relevant factors that affect the conceptual underpinnings
of their practice will determine the degree to which their responses support the
argument of this thesis. Together, the empirical and the theoretical findings offer
qualitative evidence that should illuminate the nature and extent of the problem.
ABBREVIATIONS

AS ASSESSMENT STANDARD
C2005 CURRICULUM 2005
DoE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
GET GENERAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING
LLC LANGUAGES, LITERACY AND COMMUNICATION
LO LEARNING OUTCOME
NCS NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT
NGO NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION
NQF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK
NPDE NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMA IN EDUCATION
OBE OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION
OBET OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION AND TRAINING
SAIDE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION
SO SPECIFIC OUTCOME
CHAPTER ONE: THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

1.1 Introductory comments

My purpose in this research is to investigate the place of reader-response activities in literature teaching in schools (with particular reference to works of fiction in English) within the context of a South African outcomes-based system of education. For the purposes of this investigation, “reader-response” refers to the role of the reader in bringing his or her own knowledge, feelings and experience to bear upon the encounters with written texts. Reader response approaches (it may be appropriate not to refer to a single approach) inform the variety of strategies that teachers adopt in order to bring the reader’s own perspectives and experience into play in the classroom. Many of the philosophical underpinnings of reader response, meanwhile, are to be found in a range of theories about reading imaginative literature generally referred to as Reception Theory.

For the past twenty years and more, reader-response approaches have gained greater and greater currency in pedagogical contexts, especially in schools. This may be deduced from the wealth of publications during this period in America and the United Kingdom, particularly. Examples include Benton and Fox (1985), Britton, (1977), Corcoran and Evans eds. (1987), Jackson (1983), Meek (1990), Nelms ed. (1988), Probst (1988), Protherough (1983, 1990), Slatoff (1970), Squire (1990), Tucker L.P.(2000) and Tucker N. (1990). It would therefore be more than appropriate to take account of this in our own South African context when formulating curricular proposals in respect of languages, especially those that bear directly upon the teaching and learning of literature. Whether this has
been done to any great degree in the original and revised versions of Outcomes-based Education (OBE) in South African schools will be considered in this thesis.

OBE for South African schools, as developed within the framework of Curriculum 2005, was to have been introduced in each of the phases of the General Education and Training band at the beginning of 1998. Owing to various difficulties with the preparations for such implementation, including “the lack of teacher training” (Jansen 1999:203), the initial plan was scaled down to an introduction in Grade One only – but in all schools – in that year. From there it expanded incrementally to include the whole of the initial (Foundation) phase of schooling (Grades R to 3), and in 2001, was introduced simultaneously in the Intermediate (Grades 4 to 6) and Senior (Grades 7 to 9) Phases. Previously the Intermediate Phase was called Senior Primary, while the Senior Phase was earlier referred to as Junior Secondary.

Christie (1999:289) reports that introducing a comprehensive suite of curriculum policies for transforming education “and at the same time changing the conditions of teachers’ work...in the context of extreme shortages of resources for curriculum materials and teacher development” has brought major difficulties to the task of successful implementation. She adds that in their policy approach regarding the new curriculum, the education authorities “separated formulation from implementation” (1999:290), thereby reducing the chances of successfully delivering changes. It is against this backdrop of inadequate resourcing and preparation on the part of the authorities, together with the scenario of whole-scale, across-the-board implementation without the benefit of small pilot projects, that one needs to consider some of the issues of literature teaching in an OBE context.

As a result of a review of Curriculum 2005 (C2005) in 2000, which recommended that “strengthening the curriculum required streamlining its design features and simplifying its language” (DoE 2001 a:11), work began immediately on the
development of a National Curriculum Statement (NCS) that would supersede the existing C2005 framework and policy documents. Draft versions of the Revised National Curriculum Statement preceded the final version approved by cabinet in the second quarter of 2002. The NCS does indeed embody a streamlined and simplified approach to curriculum structure, together with more explicit indications of outcomes to be achieved at all levels or grades in each phase. It also reflects the departmental injunction in 2000 that the NCS “must give a clear description of the kind of learner in terms of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that is expected at the end of the GET band” (DoE 2001 a:11).

A major change in the design features of the curriculum means that ‘specific outcomes’ (SOs) for each learning area are replaced by ‘learning outcomes’ (LOs), while ‘assessment standards’ “replace the functions previously performed by range statements, phase and programme organisers, assessment criteria, performance indicators and expected levels of performance” (DoE 2001 a:39). The critical and developmental outcomes of the ‘older’ curriculum remain, but the NCS now reflects a much simpler and more accessible structure that holds promise of being far easier to work with.

Although the design features were simplified, the core concept of ‘outcomes’ remains unchanged in the NCS. This means that, as before, teaching and learning activities are planned in accordance with pre-specified outcomes that are to be achieved as a result of particular learning experiences. Teachers must therefore still design back from the outcomes that have been identified, to the content to be covered and activities that must occur in order to attain the competencies targeted by the particular outcomes. Teaching is done towards anticipated results and the success of the teaching and learning that takes place is gauged in terms of evidence that the pre-selected outcomes have been achieved.
Two points need to be made with regard to how the ‘old’ and ‘new’ versions of the national curriculum impact on this investigation. Firstly, even though the differing design features introduce some subtle differences in perspective and emphasis between the two, the notion of teaching towards pre-specified outcomes is a core concept, common to both versions, and it is this that provides the conceptual focal point of the study. Secondly, it is the original C2005 that teachers are presently implementing, and on which they have ‘cut their teeth’. The revised curriculum statement is to be phased in over a period between 2004 and 2008. Any observations on the part of teachers whose views are solicited will be mainly relevant to C2005, which must necessarily be implemented until the phasing-out point is reached. This does not, however, exclude the possibility that teachers in some schools may well begin experimenting with the simplified NCS well before implementation date for a particular grade, or may ‘combine’ features of the two approaches. By the same token, these revisions will also be taken into account for purposes of conceptual analysis.

This thesis will not concern itself with reading and literature in the Foundation Phase, but will be directed at teaching and learning processes relevant to the Intermediate and Senior Phases. The reason for this is that an examination of reader response to literature is best conducted at levels where ‘learning to read’ per se (learning to decode words on the page, learning the phonology of the language and other essential ‘building blocks’) is no longer a major curricular issue, but where the emphasis has shifted to reading for enjoyment, meaning and ‘personal growth’.

In saying this, one is making the rather broad assumption that children generally have mastered the alphabet and the mechanics of reading by the time they have passed through the Foundation Phase. In practice, however, this may not be the safest of assumptions to make, owing, inter alia, to the extremely diverse socio-economic situations in which learners find themselves, heightened by the many decades of unequal education in South Africa. Even without the skewed
educational process resulting from state-designed social engineering, children from some backgrounds “will have had massively more experience of being read to and of sharing and enjoying books with a parent or carer in the pre-school years than other children” says Bielby (1999:29).

1.2 The problem

1.2.1 A fundamental issue of conceptual incompatibility

As mentioned earlier, the notion of obtaining evidence that pre-specified outcomes have been achieved as a result of planned learning activities, is fundamental to both the original and revised curricula, and this is central to the present investigation. “Outcomes-based Education should be driven by the outcome displayed by the learner at the end of the educational experience (process)” and it defines what “learners are to learn” in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes (DoE 1997 b: 20). The Draft Revised NCS of July 2001 reaffirms the critical and developmental outcomes that inform the learning outcomes. The NCS Overview document states that both the “content and method of education are emphasised by spelling out the outcomes to be achieved at the end of the teaching and learning process” (DoE 2001 c:18).

All teaching and learning activities in all learning areas fall within the ambit of outcomes, whether specific to a learning area as a whole, or to lesson activities in particular. The teaching of imaginative literature such as fiction is therefore also subject to the kind of planning that targets particular outcomes in advance; and the success or otherwise of the relevant learning activities is judged according to whether the outcomes that have been targeted, are accomplished “at the end of the…process” (DoE 2001 c: 18).

This serves to highlight the central issue in this investigation. Is the teaching of imaginative literature conceptually compatible with an outcomes-based learning
approach? This question must be raised when the teaching of imaginative literature incorporates strong reader involvement, and when the reader’s own experience, individuality and background play a significant role in influencing what the reader makes of a particular literary text. The problem of compatibility is strongly related to both the notion of specifying outcomes in advance, as well as to the manner in which outcomes are to be shown, most notably in terms of the tangible evidence of learning that must be demonstrated. C2005 policy documents refer to the assessment criteria, which broadly indicate “the observable processes and products of learning” (DoE 1997 b:12), while performance indicators “provide details of the content and processes that learners should master” (DoE 1997 b:17).

1.2.2 Reconciling contraries in the classroom

Apart from the fundamental question of whether two sets of concepts that lie close to the heart of their respective philosophies can co-exist in a coherent rationale for learner-centred pedagogy, there is a more practical issue to consider. Teachers of literature might detect a conflict of interests in their practice if they follow a path of encouraging creative and personal response to literary texts, and also try to satisfy the requirements of a system based on the delivery of specified outcomes. There could be real pressures (personal, institutional or both) to reconcile both sets of demands, and if the latter are perceived as undermining each other, the consequent tension could have a negative impact on the experience of literature in the classroom, quite apart from teacher morale.

One might ask what kind of rationale educators could have for making personal response through imaginative encounters with books a cornerstone of their practice. A number of writers who affirm the value of this approach are cited at the beginning of this thesis. Protherough, for instance, in attempting to answer the question of why fiction is important, says:
The ultimate importance of the fiction we read to children or put in their hands lies not in any ‘moral’ it may convey, but in the fact that through it young people are helping to develop a sense of themselves and of their shifting place in the world as they grow up.

(1983:20)

Protherough’s statement takes children’s encounters with fiction away from the idea that young readers can simply ‘get things’ out of books, and more in the direction of acknowledging that children have a rather more active role to play in the process. Developing a “sense of themselves” is highly personal, and not something that can be planned to happen at a particular time and place and as a result of a particular set of circumstances. Any teacher who recognises this point will have to consider how to approach the delivery of pre-specified outcomes when encouraging active responses by young readers.

In a sense, this contradiction is also embodied in the 1997 policy documents for C2005. The Intermediate Phase document, for example, in its presentation of the different concepts relating to the achievement of ‘specific outcome’ (SO) 3, contains expressions such as “appreciation”, “process”, “emotions”, “initial response”, “expressing thoughts and feelings”, ‘personal life” and so on (DoE 1997 b:LLC -23-24). Yet the manner in which these achievements are to be demonstrated (“demonstrated” is itself a loaded word) does not harmonise with the discourse of affective response cited above. In the same document, expressions such as “competence” (an overarching concept), “performance”, “observable processes and products of learning” and “culminating demonstrations” abound. Although there are references to learners forming opinions and assuming values through their learning, what learners “should know and be able to do” and “details of the content and processes that learners should master” are given prominence (DoE 1997 b:LLC – 12, 17).
1.2.3 Three premises underpinning the conceptual problem

The issue of conceptual compatibility, or lack thereof, between response-based literature teaching and an OBE system, is based on three premises. They are as follows:

• The background, identity and experience (including reading experience) of individual readers can play a significant part in shaping how they interpret and respond to what they read.

• A reader’s responding to literature involves inner, mental and emotional processing that includes elements such as the imagination, life orientation, prior experience and personality.

• The experience of responding to imaginative texts is a cumulative, ongoing process of interaction between reader and text.

Regarding the first premise of individual readers' identities and experiences giving unique shape to their responses, Rosenblatt explains that the term “transaction” emphasises that “the meaning is being built up through the back-and-forth relationship between reader and text during a reading event” (Karolides 1999:3). Elsewhere, Rosenblatt (1960:268) states that the reader, “bringing past experience of language and of the world to the task, sets up tentative notions of a subject, of some framework into which to fit the ideas as the words unfurl”. Iser (1981:54) notes that a particular text may affect different readers in different ways, which is “ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written”. This view is echoed to some extent by Jauss (1982:21), who does not regard a literary work as “an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period”. Holland’s (1975:43) psychoanalytic insights into the reading process emphasise the individuality of the reader, who “responds to a literary work by assimilating it to his own psychological processes…within his identity theme”.

The second premise is closely related to the first. A reader's response to imaginative literature involves inner mental processing of a highly individual nature. As Protherough (1983:14) says, fiction is not "an exercise in explanation or persuasion but a potential experience, the nature of which is in part dependent on the reader." Indeed, "it could be argued that a story does not take on its full meaning and significance unless something happens to the reader". Rosenblatt (1982:268-9) calls what happens between reader and text a "transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances". She maintains that when readers respond to aesthetic texts, their attention will "shift inward, will center on what is being created during the actual reading". Lesser (1957:39) argues that psychoanalytic concepts can be helpful in illuminating responses that are intuitive and often non-verbal, responses to texts that can "make good some of the deficiencies of experience". The concepts expressed by critics such as those cited here point to dynamic interactions between reader and text.

The third premise serves to problematise the notion that an end point can be identified at which the learner's 'culminating achievements' in literature can be assessed in terms of outcomes. Iser (1981:56) points out that a re-reading of the same text often produces a different impression from the first. Certain aspects of the text will, upon re-reading, assume a significance not perceived the first time, as we "tend to establish connections by referring to our awareness of what is to come". Jauss (1982:143) speaks of a "Horizon of Expectations" as part of reading a text, with one horizon giving away to another with each re-reading of a text, where "the experience of the first reading becomes the horizon of the second one". The second reading can in turn constitute the horizon for a third reading, and it can happen that meanings of texts often become clear to readers only upon re-reading. Jauss's "Horizon of Expectations" can also comprise expectations regarding a particular literary genre, a cultural or social context, and so on. Observations by critics such as Iser and Jauss indicate a kind of 'gestation' process of prior and continuing experience in engaging with literary
discourse. This in turn points to the difficulty of being able to pinpoint exactly when a ‘result’ has been achieved in respect of a particular reading experience.

1.2.4 Implications of the three premises

The first premise implies that readers’ responses to literary texts can differ so widely from individual to individual, even in culturally ‘homogeneous’ contexts, that responses are difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate. Planning reading activities that require evidence of pre-formulated learning outcomes could therefore be a futile exercise, or at best, one limited to more ‘mechanical’ outcomes relating to non-literary texts.

One might counter this argument by referring to the specific outcomes for the Languages, Literacy and Communication (LLC) learning area of C2005, notably SO 3, which reads: Learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts (DoE 1997 b:LLC-3). The argument might be that ‘specific outcome’ 3 is broad enough to accommodate a whole range of possible responses, thereby avoiding any accusation that it is incompatible with the evocation of imaginative response on the part of the individual. On the other hand, specific outcomes are as broad as they are because they serve as overarching outcomes to which more detailed and specific lesson outcomes must relate and with which they must be compatible. In other words, all teaching and learning units (lessons) in the LLC learning area (as with the others) must be designed to achieve at least one of the seven specific outcomes for LLC – usually more than one – but in addition, more lesson-specific outcomes (say between three and five) also need to be included. It is at this level of outcome specification that the conceptual problem arises, as the teacher’s lesson planning should be aimed at the achievement of these particular outcomes.

It is up to the teacher to devise these teaching and learning (lesson-specific) outcomes, as they are not prescribed, and they must be compatible with the
specific outcomes. The latter in turn relate to the critical outcomes, which are based on the constitution of the country. What is to prevent teachers, then, from compiling learning outcomes that allow for a breadth of learner reaction and input, and that allow for a variety of individual responses to literary texts? There are no real constraints as such, but teachers are obliged to structure their expectations in terms of interlocking concepts such as range statements (indicating the scope and context of learning), assessment criteria (indicating the kinds of evidence that relevant learning has taken place), performance indicators (specifying details of learning content and process) and expected levels of performance (attempts to specify levels of achievement appropriate to a particular grade, for example).

Apart from this, teachers need to ensure that all learning activities fall within particular programme organisers (topics or themes) and phase organisers (focal points of learning relevant to learners in a specific phase of schooling), for example “the learner as communicator” (DoE 1997 b:27). Hence, although the choice of applicable learning outcomes, as well as the content and method of learning are left to educators in the field, the latter are answerable for delivering learning activities that conform to certain prescriptions in terms of how they are structured and assessed.

In essence, educators find themselves in a position where they have the freedom to make certain choices, but within a structure that requires a commitment to produce a set of results that correlate with the deliberate choices they have made in terms of teaching and learning input. That they have to do this in a field as unpredictable as response-based fiction study, underlines their libertas in vinculis situation – ‘freedom’ in chains.

In the revised curriculum statement to be phased in nationally from 2004, the learning outcomes for ‘languages’ (to replace the LLC learning area of C2005) correspond more explicitly with the various modes of language communication
and use. Consequently the first four are based on listening, speaking, reading and viewing, and writing. The learning outcome that is relevant to literature in the classroom is number 3 – “Reading and Viewing: The learner is able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts” (DoE 2001 c:45). What is striking about the statements relating to LO 3 is that there are far fewer references to affective response than there are in relation to SO 3 in the 1997 Intermediate Phase policy document, as discussed in section 1.2.2. Indeed, there is only one such item, in the form of an assessment standard for the achievement of LO 3, and it is reproduced in progressively modified form across grades 4, 5 and 6. Prefacing the list of assessment standards is the statement “We know this (that learner has achieved the relevant outcome) when the learner: Describes feelings about the text and says if he / she enjoyed it” (Grade 4); “Describes and analyses his / her emotional response to texts” (Grade 5); and “Describes his / her own response to a text and what has influenced the response” (DoE 2001 c: 122-3).

The second premise implies that the process of reading and responding to texts cannot be equated merely with the acquisition of tangible abilities or competencies. It would therefore be inappropriate to account for the experience of responding to literature chiefly in terms of accomplishments that can be demonstrated at a particular moment.

In the discussion of what is implied by premise one, it was pointed out that in the ‘languages’ learning area of the NCS document, only one assessment standard for LO 3 refers to affective responses to texts. The rest of the assessment standards reflect typically ‘intellectual’ reading skills that are more ‘definable’ and that offer better opportunities for direct assessment. Examples for Grade 4 include: “Infers reasons for actions and justifies his / her interpretation of ideas and events”; “Understands what motivates characters”; “Identifies aspects such as main themes, characters, setting, plot” (DoE 2001 c: 122).
The Grade 5 reader analyses “the way writers create plot, setting, atmosphere and characters” as well as “…themes and issues”, which includes recognising “bias and stereotyping” (DoE 2001 c:123). Not only is the Grade 6 learner expected to analyse plot and other elements of story, but s/he must also reflect critically on themes and issues, predict consequences of actions and justify opinions. It is probably safe to assume that many teachers will readily seize on at least some of these eminently ‘teachable’ aspects of fiction about which there is a body of conceptual vocabulary, and which can be used as a frame of reference when examining texts. Even if some of the skills such as critical reflection seem a little advanced, there is still something teachers can ‘get their teeth into’, particularly when it involves essentially cognitive processing. In contrast, ‘evaluating’ responses such as ‘gut feelings’ can lead one into messy territory, one might say.

The second premise is really concerned with the intangible nature of response to imaginative literature such as fiction, and therefore raises questions about how we can know that learners have in fact responded to a text. What can readily be documented about responses are some of the tangible expressions readers give to how they feel about certain situations which they read about. This enables one, if nothing else, to ‘tick off’ the fact that readers appeared to respond authentically to sections of text. Specific outcome 3 for LLC in C2005 does not ask for anything more, but that is hardly the point. Protherough gives a graphic example of a ‘gut response’ situation, where readers express how they felt when listening to Doris Lessing’s story Through the Tunnel, about a boy’s hazardous underwater adventure:

‘I imagined it was me whose eyes were bursting and filling up with blood, a horrible feeling.’
‘I felt my stomach tightening.’
‘I felt frightened, I couldn’t do anything about it.’
‘It brought back memories of being scared, overpowered by water.’
‘It made me wonder whether he would ever find the end of the tunnel…’
‘I felt a bit dizzy.’

(1983: 3)

Merely charting responses to texts is not enough in itself, of course, if one is also concerned about the quality of response, or about helping readers to share, think about and try to understand why they feel as they do. Rosenblatt (1956:73) makes a case for personal response of a subjective nature that can stand scrutiny because of reflection by the reader on his or her own responses. For example, she describes how a reader can ask what happened, not just in the story, but “within me as I read the story? What things struck me forcibly?”. More than forty years later, Rosenblatt suggests some broad criteria for evaluating reader response, essentially for placing some reasonable constraints upon the reader’s subjectivity. She acknowledges that for her “the interpretation that takes account more of the text would have more weight than one that ignores parts of the text”, or she might prefer an interpretation that “organizes, relates, the elements or ideas in a more plausible or more mature or more discriminating way”. Interestingly, she adds that one might find “two different interpretations equally justifiable according to such criteria” (in Karolides 1999: 6).

The readers’ responses to the Lessing story are interesting for several reasons: they show intense (and genuine) feeling; they reveal a diversity of response, ranging from physical (“I felt a bit dizzy”) to empathy (“I imagined it was me…”), personal experience (“It brought back memories…”) and prediction (“It made me wonder whether…”), and they show some evidence of introspection. There is some basis here for applying the criteria for evaluating response that Rosenblatt speaks of. But this is a task that must surely demand experience, maturity and, above all, judgement, on the part of the educator who tries to help young readers navigate the unknown element of self-discovery through engaging with texts.
It is the very complexity associated with reading events that makes the task of assessing the quality of readers’ responses a daunting one. Taking the issue a little further, one might even say that reading as described in reception theory, and literature in the sense that it is understood by advocates of reader-response approaches, cannot be ‘taught’ in terms of sharply defined objectives. Opportunities can be created for children to gain access to books, but what happens to individual readers when they read is too unpredictable or idiosyncratic to be ‘planned’ in a systematic manner, particularly when it comes to evaluation. Neither C2005 nor the NCS offer much help. While both mention response and, to a limited degree, feelings, neither curriculum statement offers any detail as to how initial responses, or responses reflected upon or shared with others, are to be gauged as achievable outcomes. In no educational dispensation – not merely in one such as our OBE system – is it easy to evaluate readers’ responses; they can be extremely complex, hidden from view and highly individual, involving strong personal histories and schemata that can have a profound effect upon the ways in which readers interact with texts.

Section 1.2.2 refers to certain ‘contradictions’ in the 1997 policy documents. They follow a fairly progressive discourse in terms of the vision C2005 sets out for the quality of learning, yet their assessment structures seem at odds with the vision expressed. This tension is apparent in an introductory section of *Implementing OBE – 4: Philosophy* published by the Department of Education. One of the questions that OBE educators ideally ask themselves about their practice is “What do I want my learners to know, be able to do, value and be like as a result of my teaching?” Another is “How will I know if learners are achieving this knowledge and ability? Are my performance indicators clearly spelt out and communicated to learners?” (DoE, n.d.:6).

The educator is left in no doubt that intended outcome and assessment of outcome are to be seen as two sides of the same coin. The currency of the outcome, as it were, is valued in terms of its appropriate and unambiguous
assessment. For the educator, the “starting point is a clear statement of intended learning outcomes and their associated performance indicators” (DoE, n.d.: 6). In the first question cited above the educator refers to what learners are “to know, be able to do, value and be like”. In the second, only “knowledge and ability” are referred to in relation to the “performance indicators” that need to be made transparent to the learners. This transparency offers learners the advantage that they “know what the purpose of their learning is. They know that they will have to demonstrate their competence within a particular learning area” (DoE, n.d.:6). So while values and associated attitudes are part of the overall ‘package’ of what learners are to acquire as a result of their learning, it is easier to refer to the hard currency of accomplishments such as knowledge and skill when gauging the desired outcomes. This is the consequence of a technicist expectation about what is to be assessed and how.

Curriculum 2005 bases its vision of what learners should be like at the end of the General Education and Training stage on the critical outcomes that they ought to achieve in order to function competently and effectively in a transformed post-apartheid society and in the wider world. These outcomes revolve around competencies such as problem solving, cooperating with others, organising and managing, critical processing of information, communicating and adopting a responsible attitude to the environment. The notion of competence is essential to this vision. In Implementing OBE – 4: Philosophy C2005 defines competence as “the ability to draw on a number of different things learned and to apply these skills and understandings in new and unique contexts and situations” (DoE, n.d.:24). In a policy document competence is defined as the “capacity for continuing performance within specified ranges and contexts resulting from the integration of a number of specific outcomes” (DoE 1997:13). Considering the nature and scope of the critical outcomes, competence is an appropriate concept for overall achievement in relation to them. The main thrust of the critical outcomes is towards the development of human beings who are well adjusted to one another and to the world they inhabit. There is little suggestion of personal
growth and development of individuals who are capable of self-knowledge, aesthetic sensitivity, empathy and creative imagination. Only one of the developmental outcomes – being “culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts” (DoE 2001 c:17) leaves room for this.

With the critical outcomes giving so much expression to scientific and technological perspectives, it is hardly surprising that tangible evidence should play a central role in the assessment of learners’ competence. While the “skills and understandings” that comprise competence in the previous paragraph could be interpreted fairly broadly within a cognitive dimension, “continuing performance” (as stated in the 1997 document) suggests abilities that can be demonstrated, thus providing tangible evidence of the required competence.

Against this background, there is little explicit accommodation for the concerns of response-based teaching and learning of literature. ‘Instrumentalist’ approaches do not cater for the rich and varied nature of reader response. Because of this, and especially the strong affective element in the whole process of imaginative engagement with texts, a very different approach to indicating ‘achievement’ in response is called for.

The third premise implies that a reading activity that has no clearly demarcated beginning and end stages ought not to be assessed in terms of outcomes that focus on discrete units of learning competence.

Neither C2005 nor the NCS subscribe to the learning of discrete ‘bits’ of knowledge or skill, emphasizing instead more holistic learning in environments conducive to the all-round development of the learner. This vision is expressed in the critical and developmental outcomes and in the whole rationale for what is called “Transformational OBE”. As stated in the Philosophy document, there was general agreement that “the outcomes had to describe the kind of abilities that all people living and working in a modern South Africa would require” and to this end
a set of outcomes – attitudes/values and abilities had to be developed – that were needed by all South Africans, regardless of their particular jobs or backgrounds" (DoE, n.d.:21). In order to be competitive in a world where knowledge was changing rapidly, people could no longer be trained in narrow specializations, but needed to be flexible in order to cope with the dynamic nature of the marketplace. Hence a much broader notion of competence, as reflected in the critical outcomes, is incompatible with the achievement of isolated segments of knowledge or skill.

The NCS presents a quite lengthy list of attributes describing the kind of learner envisaged. Many of them express the spirit of the critical outcomes quite explicitly, for example the ability to “use effectively a variety of problem-solving techniques”, to “be equipped with the linguistic skills and the aesthetic and cultural awareness to function effectively and sensitively in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural society”, to “display the skills necessary to work effectively with others”, and to “be equipped to deal with the spiritual, physical, emotional, material and intellectual demands in society” (DoE 2001 c:13). These selections serve to show that the image of the critically aware citizen is not only a bold one, but that it is a comprehensive one too. On the other hand, no one person can possibly develop all these (and other) qualities in the lifespan of a school career. The principle of life-long learning is therefore relevant in this regard, and is clearly compatible with the spirit of the third premise, that there are no clearly demarcated points at which meaningful learning can be said to begin and end.

Moreover, as indicated in the White Paper on Education and Training (1995), learning, which is viewed as ongoing, need not be confined to a formal institution of learning in order to be recognised. Prior learning can be acquired informally or by work experience, and competencies recognised at a particular level may be accredited on the National Qualifications Framework, which also facilitates mobility between academic learning and training. The philosophy of life-long learning would not invite an approach that would seek to break learning up into
manageable little bits of competency, and yet the comprehensive apparatus of assessing outcomes such as range statements, assessment criteria, performance indicators, tends to send out a mixed message. One should bear in mind that an outcome has been defined in the documentation as a description of what learners should know, and be able to do with what they know, at the end of a learning cycle.

There is a clear harmony between the notion of life-long learning in a dynamic, critically aware society sensitized to issues of diversity, on the one hand, and the intellectual, moral and aesthetic development of readers who respond to imaginative fiction, on the other. If encounters with fiction are regarded as formative processes that contribute to the growth of individuals, and if the differing situations of various readers are taken into account, it would be sheer guesswork (and an absurdity) to pinpoint exact moments when significant moments of insight, empathic awareness or imaginative interaction take place in any one reader. Benton (1988:202) says “responses need time and space in which to grow. A methodology for teaching has to be built upon these principles”.

Specific outcome 3 – Learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts (DoE 1997 b:LLC-3) – is elaborated upon as follows:

The aim of this outcome is to develop a learner’s appreciation, use and creation of text as an artistic expression of thoughts, feelings, attitudes and values through exposure to a wide variety of genres. The development of learners’ listening, reading and viewing skills to recognise and use literary devices enriches the quality of their own language use and lives.

SO3 (doc. LLC-23)

Words such as “develop”, “appreciation”, “thoughts”, “feelings”, and “attitudes” imply a gradual, cumulative activity and a mental processing that defies explicit
description. The Intermediate Phase document gives encouraging pointers about what kinds of processes are emphasised in the process of responding to texts:

- emotions (e.g. sympathy, empathy, identification, rejection)
- knowledge (e.g. related to history, social conditions, human experiences, human rights)
- relationships (e.g. social sensibility, power relations)
- aesthetics (e.g. appreciation of the artistic elements).

(DoE 1997 b:LLC-23)

What ‘instruments’, then, are used to gauge how successfully outcomes are met in the field of imaginative fiction? Again we seem to come up against the “mixed message” mentioned earlier, that the “assessment apparatus” seems to send out. Performance indicators meet the need to provide “much more detailed information about what learners should know and be able to do in order to show achievement”. C2005 states that performance indicators help learners to gain greater clarity about what they are doing and why. “Because the outcome is the culmination of the learning process, there is a need to provide learners with indicators by which they can plan and measure their progress towards the achievement of the outcome” (DoE 1997 b: 17).

Terms such as “know”, “able to do” and “measure” suggest that the progress of learners can be gauged in some quantifiable manner. Because outcomes are regarded as the “culmination of the learning process”, the implication is that a particular cycle of learning is considered ‘closed’ at a specific point, a notion that may be problematic in the context of literature. How can one know when the final result of reading a text has been achieved? (This question brings one back to the speculative, even mischievous, point about whether literature can or should be ‘taught’ at all.) The statement about performance indicators that follows gives a hint about the kind of learning – or at least one of the kinds of learning expected in C2005. (My emphasis.)

Performance indicators provide the **details of the content** and processes that learners should **master**, as well as details of the learning
contexts in which the learner will be engaged...Performance indicators will help in the planning of the learning process, the tracking of progress and the diagnosing of problems. They will also allow statements to be made about the quality of achievement, that is, whether the achievement is at the level required, or whether the learner has surpassed this level.”

(DoE 1997 b: 17).

If one thinks of response to fiction as a particular instance of learning, and the latter is assessed in terms of the above functions of performance indicators, it would be difficult not to suspect a degree of reductionism in the whole process. The above quotation shows that the entire context of learning is subjected to the scrutiny of performance indicators, including all processes and all content. What is also significant is the use of the term “master” in relation to what is expected of the learner. This term connects up with “level required” and with the notion of the learner possibly surpassing this level. Such statements invoke shades of mastery learning – one of the approved assessment options for this learning area (see DoE 1997 b:LLC-8), particularly as there is also a concern with diagnosis of problems that might hinder progress to the required level.

In a field of learning such as literature, it is easier to speak of ‘required levels’ if one’s concern is more with knowledge about literary conventions or about the characters, plot, setting and theme of particular stories. Rosenblatt sounds a warning about finding “substitutes” for authentic literary activities (1956:71), or inappropriate “stances” to literature that may “satisfy short-term goals but obstruct growth” (Karolides 1999:9). “Required levels become difficult, however, when subjective elements such as aesthetic awareness, moral judgement and empathy are involved. Protherough (1983:9) cites examples of high school teachers who, in their literature teaching, endorse values such as growth and creativity, yet tailor many of their efforts to the demands of formal assessment, a scenario Protherough refers to as the “broken-backed curriculum”.

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It is tempting to find a parallel ‘broken-backed’ scenario in both the original C2005 policy documents and in the NCS documents. It has already been mentioned that there is some contradiction between the progressive discourse used in the description of the learning programmes and their outcomes on the one hand, and some elements of the discourse used in describing the assessment framework, on the other.

In its response to the Draft Revised NCS of July 2001, the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) voices criticism of the assessment standards, finding that many of them “are very specific and atomised, meaning that the set of standards gives a fragmented picture of learner achievements at a grade in the Learning Area, and loses sight of the ‘big ideas’ with which they are associated” and they find that overall, the standards amount to a “checklist of items learners must be able to demonstrate in order to show achievement of the outcome” (SAIDE 2001:1-2). The implications of fragmenting learning into ‘bits’ of knowledge and competency will be explored in some detail in a subsequent chapter. At this point the SAIDE observation has some resonance with the concerns expressed about the lack of fit between response to literature as a longer-term process, and the kinds of assessment procedures we have been considering in this section.

1.3 The two sides to the problem

The one dimension of the problem being examined in this thesis concerns the intangible, highly individual nature of reading and responding to texts. “It is, therefore, quite impossible to say from a text alone how people will respond to it”, concludes Holland (1975:12). Indeed, Jauss (1982:140-1) is of the opinion that currently the “description of texts can and should be grounded hermeneutically in…the process of reception”. This view is supported in a pedagogical context by Probst, who observes that the majority of adolescents bring to their reading of literature “a lengthy agenda of ideas, problems, worries, and attitudes” (1988:3), which means we (as educators) “must keep clearly in mind that the literary
experience is fundamentally an unmediated, private exchange between a text and a reader” and because of this, “literary history and scholarship are supplemental” (1988:7). These views help bolster the view that educators ought not to be setting agendas for literature learning on behalf of the learners themselves, or imposing arbitrary and external standards of assessment in the interests of some level of ‘objectivity’.

The other dimension of the problem arises from key principles underpinning outcomes-based teaching and learning. The latter include the requirement that learners demonstrate their acquisition of pre-specified abilities, skills, knowledge or attitudes that result, in the form of a culminating achievement, from their learning experiences. These principles are problematic in terms of the three premises discussed previously. That the learners must demonstrate their achievements conflicts with the notion of response to fiction involving intangible processes. That the achievements to be reached are pre-specified is in conflict with the conviction that reader response is highly individual and largely unpredictable. That the outcomes are interpreted as culminating achievements is not in harmony with the idea of literature learning being a continuous developmental process, with no identifiable terminal point.

These OBE principles, then, also express a paradigm that seeks an unambiguous correlation between learning inputs and outputs. Jansen (1999:146) suggests that OBE has “psychological roots in behaviourism”, and poses the question whether outcomes specified for education are “equivalent to those identified for training”.

While not purely competency-based – Kraak (1999:38) states that in South Africa, “OBET tries to go beyond the confines of competency models” – OBE attaches fundamental importance to providing visible evidence that learners have met specified outcomes and achieved given standards. Spady (1994:2) emphasises that outcomes are “what learners can actually do with what they
know and have learned”. The language of C2005 does give emphasis to what learners can **do** in terms of showing, demonstrating, applying, using, and the like. This, together with the fundamental principle that outcomes are specified in advance, (with learning activities planned accordingly) places an obligation on the teacher that has little to do with the broader aims and processes of exploring imaginative literature. The fact that the planning of content and method (input) is left to the individual teacher, school or district, does not make the task of the teacher any easier in this situation. As Christie (1999:282-3) points out, the “complex matrix” of “procedures for designing learning programmes are complex and sophisticated, if not obscure”. She maintains that this process requires “well-prepared teachers…the new curriculum is not targeted at conditions in the majority of South African classrooms”.

Two ‘nodes’ of principles and concepts have now been identified as being in ‘opposition’ to each other. The one relates to reader response approaches to literature, and the other to OBE as articulated in C2005 and subsequent curriculum statements. This opposition or tension points to a conceptual incompatibility between, on the one hand, a considerable body of philosophy underpinning a general approach to teaching literature, and on the other, a technology of assessing pre-specified outputs that apply to all learning areas in the school curriculum. Key features of reception and reader-response theory, as well as outcomes-based education in South Africa, will be examined in some detail later. At this point we need to focus on a few key issues underpinning the statement of the research problems.

### 1.4 Key problematic issues in literary theory and OBE

#### 1.4.1 Outcomes and goals

Readers’ responses do not generally account for the entire focus of literature study even at school level, but to give a heavy weighting to matters such as
knowledge of the genre and critical analysis of text at the expense of the reading experience would amount to bypassing a vital element of reading in the literature curriculum. One may hazard the assumption that readers’ subjective responses will be taken into account in various degrees in most literature teaching in schools. To refine this assumption a little, one could say that the majority of educators involved in literature teaching acknowledge that readers’ personal accounts of how they experience and interpret texts deserve at least some attention. Moreover, few teachers are likely to deny that genuine taste and discrimination develop from authentic personal response and the facilitation of opportunities to reflect, share and interpret.

How these assumptions turn out in practice can be quite another matter. In Curriculum 2005 and the curriculum revision that will gradually replace it, a variety of pre-selected outcomes form the basis of all teaching and learning activities in the classroom. This can cause certain difficulties if teachers wish to encourage genuine response. In selecting the outcomes that their lesson activities must work towards accomplishing, teachers are hardly in a position to predict the nature or scope of their pupils’ responses to the literary texts they will be dealing with. This means that in their planning, teachers can surely not go into any accurate or meaningful detail about the outcomes their learners are likely to achieve in a given set of activities. This difficulty could be avoided, however, if teachers opted for a more facile view of outcomes – where the emphasis fell on products rather than on processes, and on evidence rather than more subtle and cumulative evaluation.

Morrow places this problem into perspective, commenting that:

Our problem is that we are trying to force education into an ill-fitting conceptual harness. Without thinking about it we embrace an instrumental outlook, and then we think that unless schooling is a means to some pre-specified ‘outcomes’ it must be useless

He adds that with the bringing together of education and training in the new curriculum landscape in South Africa, one could gain the impression that what has happened is not so much an ‘integration’, as “the reduction of education to training”, on the basis that “the concept of training is rooted in an entirely instrumental outlook, that training is the means taken towards a clearly circumscribed end” (2001:96).

It could be argued in some quarters that objectives are more readily associated with “instrumental” learning patterns, whereas outcomes reflect more holistic visions of what learners are meant to achieve. Despite the inclusion in C2005 of values and attitudes in the profile of a balanced, socially and environmentally sensitized learner in achieving a comprehensive package of outcomes, the assessment apparatus of OBE tends more towards a technicist bias. This will be explored in greater detail in chapter four. Conceptually, the notion of outcomes cannot be separated from that of assessment. It may be one thing to talk of what one is aiming towards in the literature classroom, but quite another to state what outcomes are expected - or, more to the point, required. An aim or goal may suggest what teachers and learners are broadly striving towards, whereas an outcome implies something more specific and needing to be accounted for in terms of the relevant input. This is a stance that may be very inappropriate to reading and therefore a cause for concern. There are perhaps too many assumptions underlying decisions about what learners should be able to do at the end of a particular learning activity.

1.4.2 Assessment paradigm

Assuming that the notion of outcomes cannot be separated from that of assessment, the question is how one assesses the attainment of predetermined outcomes when the learning activities have involved inner, individual mental engagements. Moreover, we must ask how measurable such attainments can be, and what kinds of assessment would be appropriate to such learning. There is
every possibility that teachers will find themselves in a position where they encourage open, response-based reading activities as central to their pedagogical practice yet adopt inappropriate methods of assessment because of pressure to deliver tangible results. This creates a discontinuity in their practice, a scenario which Protherough (1983:9) refers to as the “broken-backed curriculum”.

A similar discontinuity between philosophy and assessment in C2005 has already been commented on in section 1.2.2, where it was noted that the manner of demonstrating achievement is not in harmony with some of the creative processes leading to the achievement. Kraak (1999) refers to the paradox of Curriculum 2005 containing both progressive and behaviouristic elements in its structure. He claims that the “radical language and populist appeal of People’s Education has been … resurrected to give legitimacy to what is essentially a conservative and technicist unit-standards-based assessment technology” (p.38).

In similar vein, Barnett (1994:71), in his critique of competency-driven curricula in Britain, notes the tendency for competence and outcomes to feature increasingly in educational discourse. This is acceptable to a point, but “characterizing educational processes primarily in these terms, and deploying these terms as criteria by which educational processes are to be designed and evaluated, are matters of concern”. It is a matter of some concern that learning outcomes and assessment standards in the NCS (and in the older C2005, specific outcomes, assessment criteria and performance indicators) are attuned to the kind of approach that leaves inadequate room for holistic learning in authentic contexts.

1.4.3 Interpretations of literature and criticism

Eco (1990:24) states that two ideas of interpretation have dominated through the ages. On the one side “it is assumed that to interpret a text means to find out the meaning intended by its original author”, i.e. a meaning that contains an objective
nature or essence “which, as such, is independent of our interpretation”. On the other side “it is assumed that texts can be interpreted in infinite ways.” Eco regards both instances as “epistemological fanaticism”. For him, Thomas Aquinas represents the fundamentalism of the first stance, while the opposite position, what Eco terms “Hermetic semiosis” is characterised by elements of humanism during the Italian Renaissance. A more modern example of “unlimited semiosis” says Eco (1990:32-3), is provided by deconstruction, no more so than in the work of Derrida, who believes that once a text has been “deprived of the subjective intention behind it”, its readers need not, or cannot remain “faithful to such an absent intention” hence leading to the conclusion that “a text cannot incorporate an absolute univocal meaning”.

Neither extreme is likely to prove very helpful in literature activities at school level. “Univocal” meanings could be the very stuff that literary ‘products’ are made of, and provide the kinds of evidence needed for precise assessments of pre-specified outcomes. The other extreme, however, could provide a signal that ‘anything goes’, a situation that would be untenable in a school curriculum. If this were allowed to hold sway, there would be no means of distinguishing between personal responses that were built on credible foundations and responses that were not.

In literary theory and criticism, Reception and Reader Response theories have enjoyed growing influence and importance during the 1980s and 1990s. This has resulted in a gradual shift away from locating the meaning of a work squarely in the text itself, to a place somewhere between text and reader. Reader response critics argue for the importance of interaction between text and reader for the purposes of arriving at the meaning of a written work. This is common to the major critics in the field of reception theory and reader response. Critics such as Culler (1975, 1980), Holland (1975, 1980) Iser (1978) and Rosenblatt (1938, 1978, 1982) have, with varying points of emphasis, explored how meaning is
constructed through what the reader brings to the text in terms of experience, personality and background.

The growth in influence experienced by reception theory also applies to ‘cognitive reading’ theory. The latter highlights the importance of readers’ schemata – the complex web of personal experiences and perspectives that modifies and is modified by new experiences. Cognitive reading theory does not view reading simply as a matter of decoding, but rather as an integration of ‘top-down’ processes involving background knowledge and schema, with more ‘bottom-up processes’ that focus more on what is contained in the text.

In the context of reading theory, individual critics differ from one another, however, placing different degrees of emphasis on text and reader. For Bleich (1981:134), the object of attention is not the thing itself, but a viewer’s perception of it. He defines response as a “peremptory perceptual act that translates a sensory experience into consciousness”, meaning that the experience becomes “part of the sense of self, and in this way, we have identified it”. He rejects the notion that all observers would have the same perceptual response to a sculpture, a painting, or a text. By the same token the individual’s subjective response can fall within the general parameters of agreed meanings within a shared cultural background. Individuals, as Probst (1988:238-9) explains, can communicate their “personal recreation of the work to other readers” and can observe what is shared and what is not shared in an “interpretive community”.

Bleich is probably closest to the reader’s end of the continuum, so to speak, in terms of where to locate the meaning of a work of art. Nevertheless, Bleich’s position that the meaning of text resides in the response itself implies that it would not fully accommodate notions such as Rosenblatt’s “transaction” (1978:268) or Iser’s “dynamism” (1978:21) between text and reader, because such notions allow too much of a role for the text itself. Despite their differences,
however, critics who bring the reader into the spotlight stand apart from others for whom the text is paramount.

The general position of the reader response theorists strikes a contrast to that of the literary critics who locate meaning essentially, if not wholly, in the work itself. In this paradigm textual readings are seen as occupying various positions on a continuum of accuracy or inaccuracy. This position presupposes that every work of art or text possesses a correct, ideal or complete meaning that is autonomous of any reader’s attempt to understand it. Wellek and Warren, in exploring the notion of what constitutes a work of art, warn against idiosyncratic interpretations, which, they say, cannot account for the normative nature of art. This leads them to conclude that a work of art “might be experienced correctly or incorrectly” (Wellek and Warren 1963:150).

The assumption that works of art possess a genuine, autonomous meaning and existence is a major element informing the New Criticism of the fifties and sixties, which was highly influential in literature teaching and criticism in schools, colleges and universities in many countries. Only readers or students who had acquired the necessary critical skills, knowledge and exposure to literary conventions, could be expected to get close to the completeness of meaning assumed to be tied up in every creative work. I.A. Richards, author of the influential *Practical Criticism* (1929), expressed the view that appropriate interpretations of genuine literary works had to be ‘earned’ through ‘hard work’.

1.4.4 Implications for the practice of teaching

A *Practical Criticism* type of paradigm makes it easier to visualise literature as a corpus of knowledge or literary canon about which readers can acquire knowledge. Rosenblatt (1956:71) sounds a warning about finding “substitutes” for literature – focusing on knowledge about literature, rather than readers finding their own voice and articulating genuine responses to literature. Viewing literature
as a body of knowledge also provides a platform for formulating ‘appropriate’ and ‘effective’ assessment procedures and instruments for that kind of learning.

Reception theories, on the other hand, though differing in the exact details of what happens when readers read, share common ground in the belief that readers bring something of their own identities or experience to the interpretation of what they read. Each written work is, in a sense, re-created by individual acts of reading, and has no autonomous life of its own. In this paradigm, then, it is missing the point, somewhat, to make assumptions about what outcomes must be achieved as a result of exposure to a particular work. Faced with the need to teach fiction towards pre-specified and ‘performable’ outcomes, however, teachers may find it easier to do so in ways that may fragment learning, thereby avoiding involvement with the intangible elements of response. Moreover, where the level of reading skill differs significantly within a particular group of learners, little may be taken for granted as far as the learning outcomes are concerned.

It is possible that some teachers may not be conscious of any incompatibility between reading response and devising pre-determined outcomes for response to literature. If so, it could be because they have not reflected on the conceptual issues in question, or that demands are being made on their attention by more pressing issues in their immediate teaching environment. Their views may well be directly influenced by logistical challenges such as large classes and the administrative load of recording detailed assessments for each learner. It is also highly probable that many teachers are operating in schools that, for a variety of reasons, are not supportive of their teachers during times of curriculum renewal or innovation. It is therefore difficult to predict what teachers’ perceptions are regarding their role as teachers of literature in an OBE environment.

An investigation will be conducted with a group of local teachers in order to establish whether they are aware of an inherent tension between reader response activities in the literature classroom and the need to target specified outcomes. A further dimension of the investigation will focus on what strategies
the teachers adopt when they do experience such tension. The focus of the investigation will be on the notion of pre-determining outcomes as well as on the expected structures and procedures of assessment. The findings are presented in chapters five to seven.

1.5 Hypothesis

The issues under discussion may be formulated in terms of the following hypothesis:

Response-orientated teaching of imaginative literature is conceptually incompatible\textsuperscript{1} with a system based on pre-selected learning outcomes, the achievement of which needs to be demonstrated by means of tangible evidence. Such incompatibility has the potential to create obstacles to creative and effective teaching and learning in the classroom.

What has been elucidated in this chapter may be stated as a twofold problem to be investigated:

- Whether there is an inherent tension between encouraging response to imaginative literature on the one hand, and meeting the demands of an outcomes-based education system, on the other.

- Whether teachers of literature, working within the OBE system of Curriculum 2005, experience any difficulties, conceptually or practically, in following response-based, learner-centred activities within the parameters of OBE, and if so, what strategies they adopt in order to cope.

\textsuperscript{1} The incompatibility is in respect of OBE in the version of Curriculum 2005 that teachers are presently implementing in schools. A revised curriculum has meanwhile been approved, but will be implemented only from 2004 onwards. The revisions will, however, be taken into account for the purposes of conceptual analysis, and also in cases where schools involved in this research project may have begun to implement the new curriculum (National Curriculum Statement).
1.6 Research design

Steps in the investigation will comprise:

1.6.1 A study of major contributions to reception theory.

The purpose of this is to facilitate a deeper understanding of the reading process, with particular reference to the highly personal and idiosyncratic nature of reading, and to its being a complex mental activity that is not readily observable. Reception theory will underpin the view that reading of imaginative texts involves a web of cognitive and affective responses that are neither predictable nor accessible through methods of assessment based on demonstrations of competence.

This theoretical underpinning will therefore support the argument that reader response is not the kind of activity that can be assessed in terms of pre-determined outcomes as in an OBE system, or according to assessment standards that test for discrete areas of competence. Such standards in South African OBE typically focus on specific items of competence in the learning area concerned.

1.6.2 A consideration of major contributions in the field of reader response criticism.

The latter serves to place many of the commonly held beliefs in reception theory within an educational context. Much of what appears in this section is based on empirical research undertaken in real school settings, and offers perspectives about the importance of pursuing creative reading activities (in contrast to those that lend themselves to instrumental means of testing).
Reader response critics will support the stance that responding to imaginative literature involves complex sets of processes. They will show that each individual reader brings his or her own personal schemata to the reading of texts, thereby highlighting problems associated with trying to predict the impact of particular texts on particular readers. This in turn means that pre-selecting outcomes for reading in the classroom would be incompatible with the nature of reading. Reader response criticism also points in a direction opposite to that taken by competency-based assessment procedures such as those found in OBE practised in South Africa.

1.6.3 An examination of the relevant curricula supporting an OBE system for the country.

This will reveal that very little support is given to response-based reading activities in the languages learning area of Curriculum 2005 or the revised National Curriculum Statement. This implies that educators who follow the weightings given in the curricula will not be able to give effect to what reception theory and reader response criticism consider to be the very essence of reading – individual response. It will also show that the outcomes for reading, and in particular the relevant assessment standards, give priority to reading skills that are readily assessable. This has clear implications for the fragmentation of reading, whether fiction or non-fiction, into discrete units of competence unrelated to what many argue genuine reading to be about.

The learning outcome and assessment standards for reading and viewing make it clear that the main concern of the curriculum centres on skills rather than on aesthetic, moral or personal growth in the reader. This means that values and attitudes are being neglected in favour of skills and, to a lesser extent, knowledge.
1.6.4 A consideration of the views of practising teachers who have some experience in teaching fiction in grades that follow OBE.

This first section of an empirical component, based on written responses to a questionnaire (Appendix 1), will relate the realities of teachers' views and experiences to the conceptual problem informing this investigation. The emphasis will be on obtaining and commenting critically on respondents' descriptions of their priorities in literature teaching, and of how they think regarding the implementation of an outcomes-based curriculum in this field of language teaching and learning.

The questionnaires are not intended to yield quantifiable information; it is of no significance how many respondents reply in particular ways to specific questions. Some examples of how teachers actually think and act in real-life situations will offer additional perspectives on the conceptual issue raised at the beginning. Although their responses will subject the hypothesis of this investigation to some scrutiny, they can neither prove nor disprove the incompatibility between response-based approaches to literature teaching and the structures and expectations of OBE.

The questions are designed to probe teachers' preferences in terms of what they emphasise in their literature teaching, and to elicit their views on assessment and the impact of C2005 on their preferred teaching styles. How teachers respond should also reveal the degree of consistency within individual responses as a whole, and should indicate possible areas of consensus and divergence in the views of different respondents. Such tendencies will not be quantified, however, and can therefore yield no information of statistical significance. For this reason, no attempt will be made to secure either a large sample, or one that is geographically 'representative' of the region or the country as a whole.

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1.6.5 Interviews with selected teachers or practitioners in the field: a rationale.

This procedure includes a group interview with teachers (based on questions appearing in Appendix 4), written follow-up to this interview (based on an instrument in Appendix 5), a group interview with in-service teacher trainers (relating to questions in Appendix 6), and individual interviews with teachers (based on issues contained in Appendix 7). Transcripts of two of the interviews appear in Appendices 8 and 9.

It is intended that these interviews will promote the exploration of, and reflection on, critical issues in reading and OBE principles and practices in greater detail. They should also allow more scope for respondents to engage openly with the interviewer about various aspects of problem under investigation. The interviews may be described as qualitative in that attempts will be made to obtain descriptions of “the lived world of the interviewees” (Kvale, 1996:29) and how they relate to the issues in question in their everyday practice.

Aspects of qualitative procedures that are applicable to the interviews reported on in this thesis include the following:

1.6.5.1 The interview, which focuses on particular themes, is semi-structured; it is neither rigid in its sequence of items, nor undirected. Cohen and Manion (1994:273) refer to “structured” and “unstructured” interviews, the former being tied into a fixed sequence, while in the case of the latter, “content, sequence and wording are entirely in the hands of the interviewer”. The interviews in this thesis would tend more in the direction of the unstructured interview; although the same list of items for discussion appears in each individual interview, the sequence is not of primary importance.
1.6.5.2 The interviewer is open to unexpected views and events, and is flexible in terms of how responses may be interpreted. Babbie and Mouton (2001:309) observe that “flexibility is a major advantage of qualitative research”. Indeed, respondents in both group and individual interviews reported in this thesis are in a position to produce perspectives concerning the real world of the practising teacher that are not necessarily anticipated beforehand.

1.6.5.3 The interviewer does not aim at quantifying information, but seeks to take note of and to interpret what is said in relation to the everyday world of the interviewee, as well as the manner in which it is said. There is an emphasis on nuanced description, and on the context in which it occurs.

1.6.5.4 Knowledge is produced through the interaction between interviewer and interviewee; as Babbie and Mouton state, human action is studied “from the perspective of the social actors themselves” (2001:270). This very interaction may clarify issues, meanings and intentions and “produce new insights and awareness” (Kvale, 1996:29); the presence and influence of the interviewer may hence be regarded as a positive factor. Cohen & Manion (1994:272) maintain that one advantage of the interview is that it “allows for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection”.

1.6.5.5 Ambiguous or contradictory statements on the part of the interviewee do not subvert the investigative process; they reflect the actuality of the world in which the interviewee lives and works.

1.6.5.6 Cohen and Manion (1994:281) argue that one way of achieving “greater validity” for the interviewing process is “to minimize the amount of bias as much as possible”. On the other hand, the interviewer may openly acknowledge a subjective perspective or bias if it is relevant to, and can highlight, issues being discussed. A polarization of so-called objective and subjective knowledge should not be given emphasis in a situation where spoken language is the
medium of discourse in the interaction between interviewer and interviewee.

1.6.5.7 Hypotheses do not stand or fall by what emerges from interviews. The latter, like responses to appropriately worded questionnaires, can shed light on conceptual issues or hypotheses, but do not necessarily test them for their validity. Kvale (1996:288), on the other hand, points out that interviews can test hypotheses through the “interplay of questions, counter-questions, leading questions, and probing questions”. Babbie and Mouton (2001:309) argue that qualitative researchers may “recognize several nuances of attitude and behaviour” that can illuminate research issues during interviews, and can gain a “comprehensiveness of perspective” that can facilitate a “deeper and fuller understanding”.

1.6.5.8 Because objective, quantifiable knowledge that can test hypotheses is scarcely the aim of a qualitative interview, there is an emphasis on the construing of social reality in given contexts rather than on the study of an objective knowledge that can be generalized – an emphasis on “process rather than on outcome” (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:309). This emphasis means that the qualitative interview is much closer to a post-modern concern with interactions in the social world than with positivist notions of objective reality.

1.6.6 A statement of conclusions.

The final chapter will draw together the main lines of argument concerning the nature of reading response, on the one hand, and how it relates to the structures and requirements of an OBE system, on the other. In drawing conclusions about the compatibility or otherwise between reader-response based literature teaching and OBE, each of the three main premises underpinning this investigation will be considered. The premises concern (1) the idiosyncratic nature of personal response, (2) the complex, inner
mental processing involved in responding to imaginative literature, and (3) the continuing, dynamic nature of readers’ engagements with creative texts. Moreover, response to literature needs to be accounted for not in terms of discrete areas of competence, but in holistic engagements of the whole reader, cognitively, affectively, morally and in other ways. It will be argued that the new school curriculum in South Africa falls far short of giving support to this holistic view of reading, concentrating heavily on checklists of skills instead. This situation will be seen as integral to the main arguments being put forward.

The stances of practising teachers will be taken into account when conclusions are arrived at regarding the above. Early in this chapter it was stated that the investigation of the problem would be twofold: firstly through a focus on the conceptual incompatibility between reader response and OBE, and secondly in terms of whether teachers experience any tensions arising from such incompatibility. If their responses do not reflect a general tendency one way or another, it would be difficult to form any ‘strong’ conclusions about their estimate of the problem as defined. Such a scenario would not necessarily have a negative effect on the conceptual position of this thesis, however, as teachers’ experiences and strategies could differ from case to case. They could feel that they lack experience to make a confident judgement of the issues involved; they could gloss over certain issues in their own teaching, thereby avoiding difficulties; they could simply avoid certain requirements for pedagogical or logistical reasons. Each individual is likely to make a personal adjustment to curricular demands in ways they can cope with best.
CHAPTER TWO: KEY AREAS IN RECEPTION THEORY

2.1 Introductory remarks

Speaking from an educationist’s point of view, Michael Benton (1979:73) observes that few have not felt some disquiet at “the fact that when children read stories, there is no observable outcome – no finished product for us to examine. The story has happened inside the child’s head”. Benton’s observation provides a sharp focus on the central issue being investigated in this thesis. The issue concerns the dubiousness of investing in premeditated outcomes that deliver visible demonstrations of learning achievement when the learning itself involves inner mental processing. Moreover, such processing reflects the unique and fairly unpredictable responses of individual learners.

The views of a variety of authorities in the field of reading theory and literary criticism are considered in this chapter. They will provide the conceptual underpinning for a study of reader-response theory and practice that will be explored in chapter three. A strong foundation of theory in reader reception provides the underpinnings for describing the role of the reader as an active participant in the act of reading. Reader response is not merely one of many features associated with reading (whether classroom based or private). This thesis claims that the response of the individual reader is the core of the reading activity, and the breadth and depth of reception theory shows how fundamental this element is.

What needs to be borne in mind throughout the discussion of reception theory and reader-response criticism is the conceptual difficulty involved in expressing the inner mental processes of reading as demonstrable outcomes. The cornerstone of this thesis is that reading involves so much more than can be gauged merely in terms of competencies that are assessed in the short or medium term. Chapter four will examine the concept of outcomes and
demonstrate its origins in the notion of competency. This thesis problematises the notion that planned ‘inputs’ in the form of classroom teaching and learning can be correlated with specified ‘outputs’ in the form of performance outcomes. An examination of reception theory and reader response also shows that what a reader ‘gains’ from reading cannot necessarily be gauged in short-term assessments. The effects of re-readings and further reader experiences should be borne in mind.

The role of the reader as recipient of given textual meaning, or as co-creator of meaning influences the way in which literary works are conceptualised. In the New Critical tradition the text is regarded as a complete work with its own separate identity, the meaning of which is not dependent on the perception of the reader. This implies that a literary work per se and the study of a literary work are separate, rather than mutually dependent. In reception theory, on the other hand, the meaning of the literary text is located at various points (depending on individual critics or on different branches of reception theory) between the text and the reader. The reading process therefore plays a major role in identifying the meaning of a work during a particular reading of it.

What the reader brings to the text by way of (inter alia) life experience, knowledge, memory, associations, personality and reading background, means that what he or she makes of the text will be a highly individual matter. No two readers, for this reason, will perceive the text in the same way or synthesise it with the same perspectives, constructs or schemata that already exist. What the text means, therefore, is unique to each reader. For this reason it is inappropriate for teachers to specify in advance what outcomes should occur as a result of a particular reading activity. Non-literary aspects of reading may more easily be planned and assessed in tangible terms, but not the core aspect of response to imaginative literature.
A common theme running through the theories discussed here is the role of the reader in creating textual meaning. Eco (1990:44) refers to a range of different theoretical approaches, including “hermeneutics, the aesthetics of reception, reader-response criticism, semiotic theories of interpretative cooperation”, as well as “the scarcely homogeneous archipelago of deconstruction”, which have a common interest in “the textual roots of the interpretative phenomenon”.

While the latter may suggest that text remains the basis for determining meaning, Rosenblatt offers the view that “a story or poem or play is merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols” (1956:66). Her position regarding the locus of meaning represents a balance, nevertheless, between text and reader. In what she terms a “transaction” between the two, the reader “tests whether his particular personal response is justified, whether it has incorporated as adequately as possible what the printed page offers” (1956:73).

Probst (1988:25) makes a similar point in the context of literature teaching, when he states that readers’ initial responses should be followed by “rigorous analysis” of one’s assumptions in relation to what is in the text. This kind of stance implies that a work of literature cannot be equated with either the text itself or with the experience of the reader while reading it, but at some point between the two.

Other critics such as Holland and Bleich, particularly, find a far greater role for the reader than for the text. Informed by a psychoanalytical perspective, Bleich dismisses the “objective paradigm” for its assumption that all observers would have the same perceptual response to, say, a work of art, hence creating the illusion that the meaning “resides in it” (Tompkins, 1981:35). For Bleich, “the study of literature must begin with response” because as readers we “transform text into symbols as our emotions and intellect direct us”. Even so, this does not mean that interpretation is at the mercy of subjective idiosyncrasies. Personal responses tend to fall within the parameters of agreed meanings in the shared cultural background of an “interpretive community” (Probst, 1988, 238). Culler (1980:135), while rejecting the notion of a single correct reading for each written
work, also believes in “shared notions of the acceptable and the unacceptable” for arriving at appropriate meanings for texts.

Phenomenological approaches to reading theory are exemplified by the work of Iser and Jauss. Both explore reading as an act involving dynamic mental processing that is unique for each individual reader. Iser (1978:163) refers to reading as “an activity that is guided by the text; this must be processed by the reader, who is then, in turn, affected by what he has processed”. Jauss (1982:21) compares a literary work with “an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers”. Regarding the act of reading as an interaction between text and reader, both Jauss and Iser offer a balanced view of how textual meaning is brought into being.

The reception theory discussed in the main part of this chapter covers a broad field, with a close interrelationship between its various aspects. For example the question of what constitutes a literary work is closely linked to the notion of reading as a creative process. Acknowledging a creative role for the reader in determining the meaning of a particular text will surely have a bearing on how one may identify what the text is about. Where no creative role is attributed to the reader, on the other hand, a literary work is likely to be seen as existing independently of the reader. Then again, specific emphasis is given to the interpretation of texts, something that is very relevant to yet another aspect, namely, an understanding of the reading process. For convenience, the various aspects of reading theory explored in this chapter are presented under separate headings and sub-headings, selected in such a way as to facilitate particular perspectives about reading, while also following a multi-faceted but integrated line of thought.
2.2 Identifying the literary work

2.2.1 Cognitive and affective impact of texts

Rosenblatt (1968:33) says that arising out of literary texts is “a sense of an organized structure of perceptions and feelings which constitutes for (the reader) the esthetic experience”. This echoes what she wrote exactly thirty years before, regarding the power of literature to appeal to both thought and feeling:

Vicarious experience through literature…is the result of a highly personal process…Because the literary experience penetrates to the core of personality, because it affects both thought and feeling as they are organically intermingled, literature can be an important means of bringing about the linkage between intellectual perception and emotional drive…essential to any vital learning process.

(1938, 215)

Consequently, says Rosenblatt (1938:280, 282): if “the works read had had no emotional impact upon the student, any discussion would have been empty verbiage”, rather than a harnessing of “the power of literature to develop the capacity for feeling, for responding imaginatively to the thoughts and behaviors of others”.

Protherough (1983:14) observes that an element of unpredictability marks off the study of fiction as being different from other areas of the curriculum. He says that teachers “cannot stipulate in advance what the work will do, or even assess very accurately in retrospect whether or not it has produced the personal responses hoped for”. This view presupposes that the response of the reader is a valid or essential part of what reading is about. Referring to work carried out by Alan Purves, Protherough says it was found that literature programmes in secondary schools

never fell neatly into cognitive or affective domains, because response was simultaneously cognitive, affective, perceptual and psychomotor.
Criticism involves not only analytic, intellectual activities but also ones concerned with feelings and attitudes. The experience of a story has no fixed boundaries in the way that most items on a syllabus have; to a degree it is unpredictable, and uncontrollable.

(1983, 15)

By contrast, Wellek and Warren (1963:15) hold the view that the student of literature “must translate his experience of literature into intellectual terms, assimilate it to a coherent scheme which must be rational if it is to be knowledge”. This raises two important questions, firstly, how literary study is to be perceived, and secondly, exactly what is understood by a work of art. Regarding the first question, Wellek and Warren, while referring to literature as “creative, an art”, state that literary study, “if not precisely a science, is a species of knowledge or of learning” (1963:15). If knowledge, as they hold, must “be rational” and the reader’s experience translated into “intellectual terms”, then their assumption regarding what literary study encompasses is very different from that of modern critics such as Protherough. On the other hand, the “intellectual terms” they assume for literary study would be more in line with the emphasis that C2005 places on reading, which lends itself more to an OBE approach.

2.2.2 Ideal readings: the text as a complete literary work

Although defining the nature of a work of art does not strictly fall within the scope of this thesis, it will be useful to consider the stances adopted by critics such as Wellek and Warren, and of the group generally referred to as the New Critics. Wellek and Warren (1963:145) ask ‘where’ a work of art such as a poem exists – what constitutes its mode of existence. Not the printed version, they say, because many works belonging to an oral tradition never found their way into print. On the other hand, the performance or enactment of a story, poem or song does not, in their opinion, constitute the work either, as “most importantly, every reading of a poem is more than the genuine poem: each performance contains elements which are extraneous to the poem”. They equate such performances to
renditions of music based on a musical score that is subject to individual interpretation and effect, and refer to certain readings that may be either “right or wrong” or “admissible”.

Wellek and Warren’s referring to elements that might be “extraneous” to the “genuine poem” indicates that they presuppose an ideal, complete, original conception or work that stands apart from any readings or performances of it. This is the basic assumption underlying the approach of the New Critics who, as Probst (1988:14) points out, would regard protocols of reading responses as “lying on a continuum at greater or lesser distance from a hypothetical perfect reading”. Such a reading would be “most closely approached by the most perfect reader, presumably the one most experienced and best able to suppress his individuality in the interest of objective…reading”.

Assuming that above and beyond every reading or performance lies an ‘absolute’ or ‘perfect’ work of art, Wellek and Warren (1963:146) are not inclined towards thinking of a creative work as residing in the experience of the reader. They refer to idiosyncratic and individual elements that are bound to occur in every individual experience of a work of literature. These elements are both “instantaneous and extraneous” and while even a “good” reader may experience something different in subsequent readings of the same work, “it is needless to point out how distorted or shallow may be the reading of a less trained or untrained reader”. Based on the New Critical assumption that literary texts are, through normative judgement, considered to be works of art, the implication is that not all readers will be sufficiently ‘qualified’ to judge the artistic value of such a work. Some points of view will be more ‘correct’ or ‘appropriate’ than others in judgements of aesthetic value.

Clearly, this view cannot accommodate the notion that the experience of the reader plays any role in establishing the ‘real’ meaning of a text. Consequently the psychology of the reader, though interesting in itself, can never be part of
literary study when defined as a strictly intellectual pursuit. From an OBE perspective, however, ‘acceptable’ or ‘correct’ readings of a text would certainly fall within the ambit of planning outcomes, and the efforts of a trained reader would be easier to assess in terms of given performance criteria. A clear outcome could be to enhance the reader’s ‘qualification’ to judge the artistic worth of a literary text. This could be done through the enhancement of analytical skills and critical vocabulary. In the assessment standards for LO 3 (Reading and Viewing) in the NCS, as well as in the equivalent section of C2005, there is a great deal of reference to such pursuits, while there is very little provision is made for personal response and enjoyment in relation to texts.

Rosenblatt (1978:102, 105) refers to the persuasive influence of T.S. Eliot in bringing home the ideal of “impersonality” in poetry, which strengthened the view of “the literary work as something existing in isolation”. Rosenblatt, however, points out that understanding a work of art “to refer to the relationship between a reader and a text” does not bring about “critical anarchy”, because the reader is encouraged to examine his or her responses in the light of what is, after all, in the text. The view that the reader ought to be governed to some extent by the constraints of the text is supported by Eco (1990:148), who argues that any interpretation of a portion of text may be accepted “if it is confirmed, and must be rejected if it is challenged, by another portion of the same text. In this sense the internal textual coherence controls the otherwise uncontrollable drift of the reader”.

2.2.3 Phenomenological views of literary texts

Iser (1978:21) presents a phenomenological view of a written work of art as consisting not only in the text itself, but also “in equal measure, the actions involved in responding to that text”. While the text itself provides the structure in which “the subject matter of a work can be produced”, the “actual production takes place through an act of concretization”. From this Iser concludes that a
literary work consists of two poles, the artistic (the text created by the author) and the aesthetic (the realization of the text by the reader). This means that the identity of the text lies in neither pole, but somewhere between the two. Consequently, the text “must inevitably be virtual in character, as it cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader, and it is from this virtuality that it derives its dynamism”. This is far removed from New Critical thinking, and, because it brings the subjective presence of the reader into the act of realising the text, would have much in common with reader response criticism, and would not be appropriate for an OBE approach to teaching and assessment.

Elsewhere Iser (1980:50) refers to the literary work as being “more than the text” and that the latter “only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore, the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader”. In saying this, Iser allows little room for the notion of an ‘ideal’ or ‘correct’ reading of a text, which underpins the New Critical stance. In the latter theory, normative criteria inhere in the work of art itself, and it requires a mature and ‘qualified’ reader to elucidate the work in terms of such criteria. On the other hand, Iser does allow that the individuality of the reader is, in turn, “acted upon by the different patterns of the text”. This two-way process of text and reader acting upon each other is in line with Rosenblatt’s “transaction” (1956:73) between text and reader, in which the latter critically examines his or her own response in the light of what is contained in the text.

Iser’s notion of a “virtual” text is echoed by Jauss’s belief that a literary work is not a self-sufficient entity that makes the same impact on every reader. He explains it in the following terms:

A literary work is not an object that stands by itself and that offers the same view to each reader in each period. It is not a monument that monologically reveals its timeless essence. It is much more like an orchestration that strikes ever new resonances among its readers and that frees the text from the material of the words and brings it to a contemporary existence... This dialogical character of the literary work also establishes why philological understanding can exist only in a
perpetual confrontation with the text, and cannot be allowed to be reduced to a knowledge of the facts.

(1982:21)

This “dialogical character” of the literary text supports Iser in that the ‘essence’ of an imaginative work does not reside in the text alone, but involves the reader in the process of realising the text through adding his own ‘voice’. In much the same way that a musical score is ‘dead’ until ‘brought to life’ by those who turn its ‘ink spots on paper’ into sound, a literary text has no independent ‘life’ until it is realised in the imagination of the reader. Just as understanding and interpreting the text “cannot …be reduced to a knowledge of the facts”, the playing of a musical composition consists in more than just accurately translating musical notation into sound. Jauss’s analogy could be elaborated in terms of various elements that come into play and that influence the overall meaning and effect of a creative work, such as nuance, emphasis and the disposition of the reader or musician.

Hence, for Jauss, the “structural description of texts can and should be grounded hermeneutically in an analysis of the process of reception” (1982:140-1). What this signals is that the aesthetic features of a text should be described and accounted for only through the filter of the reader’s experience of that text. This is a process in which the aesthetic characteristics of a text are “retranslated” from an objectified description, back into the process of experiencing the text. Although it does not contain the complete meaning of a particular work, the text is the “point of departure for its aesthetic effect”, and so the subjectivity of the reader’s views will be limited – the same point made by Rosenblatt and Iser. This is an important consideration from a response-based teaching perspective, as the element of personal response is tempered by what is contained in the text, and need not be ‘dismissed’ as too idiosyncratic to be taken seriously, especially in an OBE environment.
If a literary work is “virtual in character” and can, in Iser’s view, be identified neither with the actual structure of the text nor with the subjective experience of the reader, it is the interaction between the two that brings about actualization of the work. Hence for Iser (1978:21) “exclusive concentration on either the author’s techniques or the reader’s psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself”. Iser does not deny the vital importance of each of the two poles (the “artistic” and “aesthetic”) of a literary work, but warns that if a reader loses sight of the relationship between the two (i.e. text and reader), “one loses sight of the virtual work”. Because the reception of a literary text is not a one-way process of transmitter-receiver that presupposes a commonly known code, separate analysis of textual features and reader disposition would be inconclusive. This is a crucial point that should be borne in mind when reading is included in the curriculum. In both C2005 and the NCS there is a noticeable emphasis on analysis of textual structure and literary conventions in relation to literature, and little more than a mention of the disposition of the reader. In the light of what Rosenblatt, Iser and Jauss are saying, this is clearly an inadequate pedagogical approach from the perspective of reader response.

2.2.4 Reading as a creative process

Louise Rosenblatt could be regarded as the first of the contemporary critics to draw attention to an active role for the reader in contributing to the meanings of texts. Although she first published her views on reader reception in 1938, it was some thirty years before sections of the literary establishment began to take notice. In the intervening years the New Criticism had taken root and flourished in literary and academic circles. One of the reasons for this cited by Rosenblatt (1978:101) is “the prestige of objective scientific modes of thought”, which together with reaction against literary history and romantic impressionism, “militated against recognition of the important role of the reader”.
Acknowledging that the reader does indeed have a role to play in helping to create meaning suggests that reading is partly a creative activity. Rosenblatt (1968:34) approaches the ‘creative’ role of the reader via examining the creative process entered into by the author. Whereas in daily life we are able to see patterns and relationships, we never give as holistic and unified a form to our perceptions as does the creative author, who “enables us to share his vision”. The author communicates a creative vision to his or her reader through being selective regarding images, people and events in a special relation to one another. The new sequences or elements thus created evoke in the reader responses of both an emotional and an intellectual nature.

“The reader, too, is creative” argues Rosenblatt (1968:34-5). This is because the literary experience is “a transaction between the reader and the text. Moreover, as in the creative activity of the artist, there will be selective factors molding the reader’s response. He comes to the book from life”. The particular preoccupations of readers’ personal lives at the time of reading a text will have a bearing on how they assimilate the text before them. Rosenblatt argues further that the same text “will have a very different meaning and value to us at different times or under different circumstances”. While this may not necessarily be vividly so in a particular reader’s range of experiences, the passing of time may well create these different meanings and values, especially in the case of a reader maturing from childhood or adolescence to adulthood. This supports the third premise of this thesis, that readers’ responses are ongoing, and cannot be said to end at a particular point, and so a system such as OBE, which seeks to assess clearly delineated aspects of readers’ engagements with texts, results in an artificial fragmentation of response.

Rosenblatt underscores the creativity of the reading process in the context of the reader’s own personality and background:

    Every time a reader experiences a work of art, it is in a sense created anew. Fundamentally, the process of understanding a work implies a re-
creation of it, an attempt to grasp completely the structured sensations and concepts through which the author seeks to convey the quality of his sense of life. Each must make a new synthesis of these elements with his own nature, but it is essential that he evoke those components of experience to which the text actually refers.

(1968:113)

The re-creation of the work involves the “synthesis” of the new elements with the reader’s own nature. Importantly, the reader must evoke those elements of experience “to which the text actually refers”, so there should be no question of unfettered subjectivity in the reader’s response. Rosenblatt states, however, that “the import of any work will remain thoroughly personal, since it is re-created by a specific personality with its own sense of values”. Consequently “there is not necessarily only one “correct” interpretation of the significance of a given work” (1968:114). This supports the first premise of this thesis, that individual readers bring something unique from their experience to their engagements with imaginative literature, and this plays a crucial role in shaping their response to it. For this reason it would not be feasible for educators to attempt to predict how readers will respond, or to base any learning outcomes on such response. It is even less feasible to assess personal responses according to criteria linked to such outcomes. It is not merely the unpredictability of response that is the issue here, but also its creativity – something that does not lend itself to performance criteria of the type associated with OBE.

Iser (1980:51) links the creative process to the power of the reader’s imagination actively to work things out in the context of, say, a story. A creative reading process that is familiar to most readers is that of filling the gaps left in the text itself – in the context of fiction these are referred to as ‘narrative gaps’ or ‘storytelling gaps’. Iser explains that different readers can fill in such gaps in different ways, which accounts for the situation where one text could be realised in several different ways. He refers (1980:54) to Laurence Sterne’s conception of a literary text as something like “an arena in which reader and author participate in a game of the imagination”. For example, if the reader “were given the whole
story, and there were nothing left for him to do, then his imagination would never enter the field”. Lesser (1957:147) gives this process of gap-filling in texts a slightly different perspective when referring to details that the author leaves to the reader’s imagination. Firstly, he emphasises the potential for reader empathy, noting that if a hero is “not too precisely described, it may make it all the easier for us to slip into his place”. Secondly, Lesser relates possibly subliminal needs to the activity of filling in narrative gaps with his observation that if a heroine “is described in vague or conventional terms, we may more readily picture her after our own desiring”.

Texts, concludes Iser (1980:51), should be constructed in such a way that they engage the reader’s imagination, “for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative”. Furthermore, the fact that “completely different readers can be differently affected by the “reality” of a particular text”, he argues, “is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above the mere perception of what is written”. This reveals the dynamics of reading, whereby the reader “implicitly acknowledges the inexhaustibility of the text” (1980:55). It also serves to underline the excessive difficulty that critics might have if they were bent on predicting the responses that could be elicited from texts. The task would be even more daunting for educators who attempted to specify in advance what the learning outcomes of such reading experiences should be. The process of filling narrative gaps within a pedagogical context will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.3 Understanding the reading process

One aspect of reading that either unites or divides literary theorists is the degree of activity or inactivity they are willing to attribute to the reader with regard to arriving at the meaning and identity of literary texts. This aspect has, either implicitly or explicitly, informed much of what has been discussed so far, particularly in this chapter. The final section of the chapter will consider some of
the concepts underpinning the debate about the role of the reader, and in particular, the individual reader, in realising texts. The extent to which readers’ engagements with literary texts are generic or idiosyncratic will have much to do with the feasibility of an outcomes-based approach to teaching and assessment.

2.3.1 Schemata

Schema theory supports the main argument of this thesis in that it offers an explanation of how it is that each individual reader engages with imaginative texts in a unique way, unshared with anyone else. Different authorities and critics have their own perspectives, but for the purposes of this thesis, the broad terms of reference for schema theory are given in the following two paragraphs.

The current perspectives of an individual, built up on the basis of experience of different kinds, are influenced or even modified in the light of encounters with new experience. The latter is in turn influenced and possibly modified by previous experience. Hence, when new experiences arise, existing schemata (perspectives based on experience) provide a framework against which the new can be gauged. New experience, in turn, can cause one to scrutinise existing schemata in the light of the new, with the possibility of modifying them. Schemata provide people with a framework that enables them to gauge, classify and deal with an infinite variety of new experiences through relating them to what they already know.

In the context of responding to literary texts, the existing schemata of an individual reader are carried into an encounter with the unfamiliar schemata presented in a poem or work of fiction. If the latter relates in some way to what the particular reader already knows, has experienced or has read about (i.e. the existing schemata of this reader), a ‘confrontation’ of sorts takes place between the old and the new. If, for example, a reader has had prior experience of mountaineering – either in reality or vicariously through reading – that reader will
carry certain perspectives, memories and expectations into any new encounter – either real or vicarious – with mountaineering. A story, say, which involves mountaineering, will not be experienced in quite the same way by any two readers because their prior experience will differ. Even if two or more readers have had prior experience of the same issue or activity, their experiences of it will not have been identical, so they will not carry identical schemata into any new encounters. An individual reader therefore experiences an encounter with a text in ways that cannot be shared with any other readers. The existing schemata of this reader are likewise influenced by the new encounter in a unique way, which implies an ever-increasing complexity in schemata formation in each individual.

It is this complexity, brought about by constant adjustment and readjustment in the light of new experiences, that makes the schemata of every individual not only unique, but also difficult to fathom. So not only is it highly improbable that two readers will have the same set of accumulated experience, memory and expectation going into the reading of a text, but it will be as improbable that they – still less anyone else – will have a clear perception of what this consists of or be able to describe or analyse it. How then can educators, working in an OBE system, plan particular outcomes based on their learners’ engagements with literary texts, when these engagements are so difficult, if not impossible, to predict? It is not only the assumption that responses can be predicted that is problematic, but also that of attempting to gauge or assess such response. It is not surprising that Benton (1979:69) should describe reader response as the “Loch Ness Monster” of literary studies.

Iser’s concepts (1978:34) of “real” and “implied” readers offer a perspective on the processes that take place during the formation of schemata. The life experiences and disposition forming the schemata of the “real” reader contribute to what he or she makes of the content and structures of texts not previously encountered. This disposition must accommodate itself to what is in the text, which is associated with an “implied” reader – the basis of how the author would
assume his or her text to be received. It is this process of accommodation between what the “real” reader contributes and what the “implied” reader presents that results in a creative tension between reader and text. Iser sees this tension as a dynamic interaction played out in a kind of no-man’s land between two poles, the artistic (the text created by the author) and the aesthetic (the realisation of the text by the reader). It is the nature of this interaction between the two poles, between “implied” and “real” readers, and between the familiar and the unfamiliar, that determines what the text will mean for the reader. Iser concludes (1978:21) that “exclusive concentration on either the author’s techniques or the reader’s psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself”. Because a text “cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader”, it must “inevitably be virtual in character”. The gulf between this view and the assumptions underlying the expectations and precise assessment strategies of an outcomes-based system is highlighted further by Iser’s observation (1978:21) that in literature “the message is transmitted in two ways, in that the reader ‘receives’ it by composing it”.

Value systems may also have an influence on the schemata of individual readers, hence influencing the idiosyncratic nature of their reception of a text, as well as how they ‘compose’ it in the sense used by Iser. An individual literary work, containing what Iser (1978:86) calls a “repertoire” of material “selected from social systems and literary traditions”, may contain schemata that challenge those of a particular reader. The response of a reader will, in part, be influenced by that reader’s value system or ability to accommodate his or her view to what is unconventional. This cannot be known in advance by any teacher who is thinking of particular outcomes associated with learners responding to the “…affective, cultural and social values in texts” (DoE, 1997:LLC-23). The affective value that a text offers to an individual reader is a further imponderable, hence making some of the key assumptions of C2005 highly questionable. Again, it is not merely the principle of predicting and planning outcomes that is the issue, but also the whole question of how responses, determined by an unfathomable complexity of
influences, are to be assessed in the OBE style. The image of the Loch Ness Monster rises once more.

In order to illustrate the importance of the reader bringing something of his or her own to the text in order to derive aesthetic pleasure from it, Iser (1978:92-3) draws on Posner’s theory of the “first” and “second” codes in reading. The schemata of the text appear as the first code, while the context to which it refers is the second code. The reader produces the second code through interacting with the first. A story about an individual who commits a legal indiscretion, for example, comprises the schemata of the first code, while the social system containing the legal system against which the transgression is made, and which the reader understands, constitutes the second. The reader, by interacting with the schemata of the text (first code), infers the second code through familiarity with it as the context to which the story refers. The schemata of the first code (the story) cannot be changed, but the schemata of the second can, however, undergo modification if the reader’s response to the text leads him or her to make adjustments to previously held values or schemata. Iser states that the second or, as he calls it, the secondary code “will vary in accordance with the social and cultural code of each individual reader, who will then decipher it in his own way, thus producing the variable secondary code”. Iser argues that it is in the deciphering of the secondary code that the reader derives aesthetic pleasure from reading, adding that it is “the very insubstantiality of the aesthetic object that spurs on the reader’s imagination”. One recalls that in the context of the implied reader, if the ‘real’ reader were to bring nothing of his or her own disposition to the concretisation of the text, the latter would be robbed of its power to excite the imagination. It is ironical that the “insubstantiality” to which Iser refers is in fact a strength, because it enables a dynamic personal interaction between the unalterable text and the variable perspective of the reader.

Rosenblatt (1956:68) illustrates what is essentially a process of schemata formation by referring to the development of the beginning reader, who draws
from past experience in order to make sense of what appears in the text. Conversely, the young reader also “uses the printed words to organize and interpret that past experience…and attains new insights”. For this to happen there must be a “continual shuttling back and forth between words and past experience and newly crystallized understanding” (68). If this does not happen, reading can all too easily be reduced to “mere verbalization”, a situation that is by no means limited to the beginning reader, in Rosenblatt’s experience. “Mere verbalization”, on the other hand, would be a far more straightforward matter to plan and assess in an OBE context such as C2005. There is hence the danger that potentially meaningful explorations of literary response could be reduced to a level that OBE could more easily manage.

The first process of drawing from past experience represents the reader’s initial encounter with the textual structure. The latter could be referred to as schemata if what appears in the text invites more than a mere deciphering exercise, but also contains a code, or a set of perspectives, which may or may not coincide with those of the reader. Using printed words to “organize and interpret past experience” is the process of adjusting one’s personal schemata (relating to the social and cultural world) to accommodate the schemata presented in the text. This is similar to the situation described by Iser when he refers to the “secondary code” (1978:93) – the social and cultural world of reality – varying in accordance with the personal code of each individual reader.

Earlier it was stated that schemata can refer to a value system, one that applies both to individuals and to communities that share certain cultural assumptions. Reading and responding to texts is, however, mostly a private activity, and each individual reader, although a member of what Fish (1980 b: 182) refers to as an “interpretive community”, brings a host of personal schemata that are not necessarily shared with others. The very fact that one reader has had reading experiences that others do not share means that readers take different schemata into their reading of new texts. A reader’s prior knowledge of a genre of literature
will also influence his or her response to a text that relates in some way to it, an experience that Eco (1990:89) terms “intertextuality”. Hence, in the classroom context, one reader’s response to a cowboy or science fiction story may be different from another’s, because the first reader will have certain expectations based on prior experience. This is a further example of why readers may differ markedly from one another in terms of how they respond to particular literary works, and why their responses are so difficult to predict. It is in the light of these considerations that schema theory provides a strong underpinning to an understanding of the conceptual problem that lies at the heart of this thesis.

2.3.2 Horizon of expectations

The concept of ‘horizons of expectations’ offered by Jauss bears a relation to theories about schemata, as the principle of modifying existing perspectives in the light of ongoing experience is common to both. These perspectives are individualised, and this, in common with other reception theories, emphasises the idiosyncratic and dynamic nature of reading responses. Every reader, says Jauss (1982:143), is familiar with the experience that “the significance of a poem often discloses itself only on rereading, after returning from the end to the beginning”. The “experience of the first reading becomes the horizon of the second one”. This experience may be confined to the “poem” as a particular text, dealing with its unique subject matter, but subsequent readings may bring the reader to discover further horizons as the themes are understood and related to a wider context. This underlines the ongoing and developmental nature of reader response, the third premise supporting this thesis, and one which challenges the assumption in C2005 that response may be assessed in a precise manner at a particular point that reveals whether a particular outcome has been achieved or not.

Jauss refers to three steps in the process of interpretation, or “hermeneutic process” (1982:139), namely perception, understanding and application. These
steps could be inferred from the above example of rereading a poem. The first step brings about direct perception of what is contained in the text, what one might call initial response, the second brings some understanding of themes, while the third involves the process of applying knowledge from the ‘primary context’ – the poem – to a wider social or cultural context. It is in this context that the value systems of readers may play an important role in the development or modification of their personal schemata, particularly when they come into conflict with those represented in texts. As stated earlier, this is difficult to predict in the case of individual readers.

There is another sense in which horizons of expectations are created in a text, however. This relates to the reader’s knowledge of genre or convention in literary works. An individual literary text “awakens memories of that which was already read”, says Jauss (1982:23). The beginning of a work arouses expectations with regard to subsequent parts. A reader, for example, who is familiar with the ‘story grammar’ of prose fiction, will learn to anticipate an element of complication, climax and some kind of resolution. It can happen that these genre conventions are “maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically”. When certain expectations are frustrated by any unusual or ironical treatment of the convention, readers’ horizons shift, their expectations change and their schemata relating to established or traditional story structures adjust themselves to accommodate new perspectives.

Different readers bring different sets of expectations to their reading of texts. These expectations result from the horizons that have been opened up for them through their knowledge of literary conventions – what Eco (1990:89) refers to as “intertextuality” – their life experience, their relation to their social and cultural context and other factors. Just how their horizons will appear or recede in the course of responding to works of fiction or other genres would be difficult to predict. In an educational context, it would be a frustrating exercise to plan for
particular reading outcomes when the prior knowledge, experience and expectations of individual readers are unique to each.

2.3.3 Reading as a transaction

Rosenblatt (1982:268) views the act of reading as a transaction, a “two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances”. She uses the term “transaction” to emphasize “that the meaning is being built up through the back-and-forth relationship between reader and text during a reading event” (in Karolides, 1999:160). Readers bring past experience of both language and the world to their reading, and establish preliminary ideas of a topic – a tentative “framework into which to fit the ideas” as the words of the text unfold. If the subsequent words in the text do not fit into the framework, says Rosenblatt, the framework “may have to be revised, thus opening up new and further possibilities for the text that follows” (1982:268). This description integrates the notion of a transaction into that of schemata formation, and gives emphasis to the process of give-and-take – in a sense the “receiving” and “composing” referred to by Iser (1978:21), which is so problematic in terms of an outcomes-based approach.

The most important choice that the reader must make, however, occurs very early in a particular reading activity: the reader must decide what attitude to adopt towards the text, what the essential purpose is of a particular reading act. Rosenblatt prefers the word “stance” to convey the orientation a reader must adopt in respect of essentially “public” or “private” meanings in texts (1999:165). She illustrates the difference between the two kinds of meaning by referring to a mother who desperately reads the label of a bottle containing a poisonous liquid that her child has sampled. The mother’s attention will be focused on what she must do after reading the instructions for neutralizing the poison. Key words will stand out; the word “water” will have a specific significance, for example. Whereas in other kinds of reading, the word may evoke numerous associations
on the basis of her language and life experience, in this instance the focus is entirely on its function with regard to neutralizing poison. The kind of reading the mother does in this situation Rosenblatt terms “efferent”, referring to what information must be ‘carried away’ and “what actions to perform after the reading ends” (1978:24). This kind of reading engagement is instrumental in nature, and quite compatible with the assumptions underlying outcomes and assessment based on demonstrations of competence.

A very different stance is that which a reader adopts with regard to “private” reading, which includes the reading of imaginative works such as poems and novels. Rosenblatt calls this “aesthetic” reading (1978:24). Her description of it makes it clear that a reader’s engagement with this kind of reading is not a process that can be predicted, and that ‘competence’ in it cannot be demonstrated according to predetermined criteria. Four aspects of the reading process are worth noting here. Firstly, the reader’s attention “will shift inward”; secondly and thirdly, the reader will focus on “what is being created during the actual reading”; and fourthly, a “much broader range of elements will be allowed to rise into consciousness”.

The first aspect indicates the “private” nature of the reading. The reader is not concerned with “public, generally shared meanings” that would be considered “impersonal, repeatable, verifiable” (in Karolides, 1999:165), but with “personal feelings, ideas, and attitudes” (1982:269). Secondly, something creative is happening during the reading. Rosenblatt refers elsewhere to a work of art being “created anew” by the reader, who makes “a new synthesis” in transaction with the text (1968:113). Iser also refers to the “inexhaustibility of the text” (1981:55) and the many ‘gaps’ that are filled by the imagination of the reader. The third aspect is about the importance of the reading experience itself – what happens during the reading, as Rosenblatt (in Karolides, 1999:165) puts it, what is being “lived through” in terms of “ideas as they are embodied in the images, the sensations, the feelings, the changing moods”. What happens during reading is
what determines initial response as well as subsequent responses as the reader progresses through the text. The fourth aspect involves the extension of reading the activity into related areas of experience, akin to Jauss’s third step in the hermeneutic process, namely application of text to a wider social and cultural context. Other elements that will “rise into consciousness”, as Rosenblatt puts it, will include many of the associations that would be excluded from instrumental or “efferent” readings, perspectives that would impact on readers’ existing schemata.

During such reading, Rosenblatt sees the following kinds of happenings taking place:

In order to shape the work, we draw on our reservoir of past experience with people and the world, our past inner linkage of words and things, our past encounters with spoken or written texts. We listen to the sound of the words in the inner ear, we lend our...emotions...to the new experience which, we feel, corresponds to the text. We participate in the story, we identify with the characters...

At the same time there is a stream of responses being generated. There may be a sense of pleasure in our own creative activity...We may be aware of a contrast between the assumptions or expectations about life that we brought to the reading and the attitudes, moral codes, social situations we are living through in the world created in transaction with the text.

(1982:270)

Rosenblatt is saying that aesthetic reading is a personal and individualistic activity, that the reading experience itself is important, that cognitive and affective processes are taking place, and that the ‘horizons’ of the reader are changed in accordance to how personal codes and perspectives interact with those in the text. This is weighty testimony to the complexity of response, seen as a process that is unique to each individual. Pedagogically, this points to a fundamental misfit between what happens when a reader engages creatively with imaginative texts, and curricular injunctions that generic outcomes be produced in ways that are amenable to precise assessment procedures. The latter is not only unjust to
the learner, but also to the educator, whose role surely is to use her judgement in facilitating readers’ multi-faceted responses, which encompass both intellectual and emotional explorations.

No matter how ‘good’ a text, however, the reader’s stance must have a lot to do with what emerges from the reading, from the purpose with which the reader approaches a text. Educators will know, nevertheless, that “one cannot predict which text will give rise to the better evocation – the better lived-through poem – without knowing the other part of the transaction, the reader” (1982:269). In a South African OBE context, one cannot make this assumption about what educators “will know”. In terms of what they are enjoined to do in C2005, they are not required to know this. They are required to work with generic responses, which lead to generic, measurable outcomes. Rosenblatt illustrates what ought to be the case, when describing Dorothy White’s work with very young children listening to stories:

The author, she points out, may plan a particular book, but “one cannot plan what children will take from it”. Understanding the transactional nature of reading would correct the tendency of adults to look only at the text and the author’s presumed intention, and to ignore as irrelevant what the child actually does make of it.

(Rosenblatt, 1982:272)

The belief that young children should first grasp the text cognitively, that is, efferently, before they can respond to it aesthetically, is “a rationalization that must be rejected”, says Rosenblatt (1982:273). This observation has implications of the greatest significance for the assumptions underlying OBE as implemented in C2005. The conflation, intentional or otherwise, of “aesthetic” with “efferent” reading purposes is a constant possibility when all reading activities are made to fit into the conceptual harness of an outcomes-based system.

Rosenblatt believes it is crucial that “reading be learned as a means of making meaning, either predominantly efferent or predominantly aesthetic”. The aesthetic
stance, “in shaping what is understood”, produces a meaning in which “cognitive and affective...are intermingled”. (in Karolides, 1999:167). She draws attention to the frequent adoption, in educational contexts, of stances that are inappropriate to the reading of aesthetic texts. One of the problems she identifies is the difficulty many educators have in knowing how to teach students to adopt appropriate reading stances. In a South African OBE context, teachers are given practically no encouragement to even try to do so.

2.3.4 Psychoanalytic perspectives on reading

If one were to select a point on an imaginary continuum between text-centred and reader-centred approaches to literary criticism, one might be tempted to place psychoanalytical approaches firmly at the reader’s end of the spectrum. To do so, however, might lead to inaccurate perceptions about a heavy emphasis being placed on the importance of the reader at the expense of the text, or about all psychoanalytical theories emphasising the same sorts of things. Some psychoanalysts may all but ignore what stands in the text, preferring to focus attention on how readers shape textual structures in accordance with their own subliminal needs. Others may be reluctant to disregard the status of the text as a given entity about which a community of readers can reach consensus. On the other hand, psychoanalysts do share common ground in placing the structure of individual readers’ personalities at the centre of critical attention.

Holland (1975:4) argues that a combination of psychoanalytic interpretation and literary analysis provides a sound theoretical platform that can “account for the way readers read to fit their personalities”. Central, then, to Holland’s theory of reader-response is the structure of the individual reader’s personality and his or her sense of identity. He follows the line of thought that the reader’s responses give meaning to texts:

He gives them life out of his own desires. When he does so, he brings his lifestyle to bear on the work. He mingles his unconscious loves and
fears and adaptations with the words and images which he synthesizes at a conscious level.

(1975:12)

Holland concludes that it is, therefore, “quite impossible to say from a text alone how people will respond to it”. The pedagogical implications of this conclusion are similar to those arising from the theories of Iser and Rosenblatt, although sourced more strongly in the concept of individual personality. How does he arrive at the conclusion that the text alone is no basis for predicting how people will respond to it?

He observes (1975:40) that all readings “originate in the reader’s personality”; although some readings do take “close account of the words-on-the-page”, the reader “structures and adapts it according to his own inner needs”. The book, then, is not a fixed stimulus, and “each reader must give the words meaning, and he can only give them the meanings they have for him”. He refers (1975:56) to the concept of ego identity, associated with Eriksen, as being a significant and constant factor in influencing personal outlooks and choices in life.

Holland (1975:113-7) arrives at four principles that describe the “inner dynamics of the reading experience” Firstly, the reader tends to re-enact his or her own style or approach to life’s situations in the structure of the text. The reader will therefore seek for textual evidence in, for example, the actions or attitudes of a character in a story. Secondly, the defences of the reader (what one might call defence mechanisms) must be matched in the sense that something must be found in the text “that does what he does to cope with needs or dangers”. Thirdly, the reader projects his or her own fantasies on the work that is read. Holland argues that “fantasy does not lie latent in the work” – only the “materials” for such exist in the text, which the reader “will then create for himself in the terms that give him pleasure”. The fourth principle concerns ‘higher’ ego functions such as the interpretation of themes. Once the more basic points of connection such as the matching of defences have taken place, the reader synthesises elements in
the story, recreating it to match his personality and style. Holland states that the unity of the work does not merely reside in the text itself; the reader creates the unity from his or her positive relation to the story. He expresses it in the following way: “Each act of reading is constructive. It makes something new, something human, something personal – or else no real act of reading takes place” (1975:122).

What emerges from the above is that the readers are ‘captive’, in a sense, to the particular direction that their personalities and sense of identity take them when dealing with the conscious or unconscious pressures in their lives. This, however, translates into a creative, synthesizing activity in relation to how events and characters in fictional texts are interpreted. It also creates a harmony between text and reader through the act of reading. Holland puts his view succinctly:

A reader responds to a literary work by assimilating it to his own psychological processes, that is, to his search for successful solutions within his identity theme to the multiple demands, both inner and outer, on his ego.

(1975:128)

If one were to add the influence of schemata to the psychoanalytical dimension of response, there would be an even stronger case for refuting the assumption that learning experiences can be based on the generic notion of response.

A psychoanalytical approach such as Holland’s does not, however, imply unfettered subjectivity on the part of the reader. It does leave room for arriving at consensus regarding the meaning and impact of literary texts. He believes in a “critical community” that is “both unified and diverse” (1975:248). Paradoxically, “only by beginning with different subjectivities can we arrive at that consensus about experience that constitutes all the objectivity subjective beings can have” (1975:231). If human beings were not different, and experiencing life subjectively, they could not have any sense of reality, says Holland. He argues that individuals can only achieve a measure of objectivity by having their subjectivity limited. In
the “critical community”, people belong to “the same cultural group…especially because they construe their experience in the same way” (1975:241). This does not contradict what has already been said about readers construing texts according to their personal identity themes; it indicates that communities are made up of individuals who experience life subjectively, but who also share many cultural assumptions that give them an identity as a society.

Holland is critical of the views of literature and criticism held by Wellek (and Warren). Their belief that a work of art exists independently of the perception of the reader implies that not all readings will be of equal value. The fact that there are many and diverse interpretations of great literary works such as *Hamlet* is an indication that they cannot be limited to the reception of one mind only, but that their apparent inexhaustibility is a sign of their greatness as art.

When compared to the main tenets of Holland’s approach, certain aspects of Lesser’s thinking seem to verge on ‘bibliotherapy’. We read “because we are beset by anxieties, guilt feelings, and ungratified needs”, says Lesser (1957:39). He argues (1957:44) for the view that fiction carries deficient human beings into a realm “more comprehensible and coherent” and we “turn to fiction, it could almost be said, not so much to satisfy already known needs as to find out what our needs are”.

The use of psychoanalytical terms to describe reading experiences may suggest a greater difference than really exists between this school of critical thought and others not informed by psychoanalysis. Lesser speaks, for example, of the *ego’s* ability to deal with real problems better when confronted vicariously in “great” fiction (1957:101), while the *superego* gains some solace from the knowledge that certain issues that we are not happy about in our own lives occur elsewhere too. If one were to exclude the terms *ego* and *superego* there would be no real difference between the view that is expressed here, and one that might appear in a journal on children’s literature. Lesser provides an example himself:
Fiction *objectifies* our problems: it translates what was internal and amorphous, or too close to us to be seen clearly, into something outside ourselves and easy to perceive: a series of images delineating a specific action, its causes and its consequences.

(1957:151)

Another process during reading that places much emphasis on the uniqueness of response is what Lesser calls “analogizing” (1957:148). This is when the reader recalls an event (or invents one) that parallels the story or part of the story being read. Again, what the reader brings to the reading of fiction is quite unpredictable, and there is no certainty that all readers will be able to produce a suitable analogy in the first place. Furthermore, this could not occur without the operation of personal schemata, a process that is complex, unique to each individual, and has profound educational implications.

In some ways the psychoanalytical perspectives on reader response appear to be firmly rooted in the discourse of human personality structure and identity. The focus of attention is not on the text per se, nor on the nature of the relationship between text and reader, but on *what* the relationship that is formed between reader and text shows us about the nature of the reader. Consequently, the general emphasis of the psychoanalytical orientation gives even less reason for believing that reading response, and all that it entails, can be accommodated within the ambit of C2005.

### 2.4 Concluding comments

Reception theory encompasses a wide range of interpretations about what happens when readers read, and each theorist makes a particular contribution to an understanding of the reading process. What all reception theorists have in common, however, is a firm conviction that the reader has an important role to play in determining the meaning and impact of literary texts. Reception theory
shifts the centre of gravity away from the text to the reader; the experience of reading assumes greater importance than the text on its own. What the reader has experienced prior to reading a particular text plays a significant part in shaping his or her response, and no two responses to a specific text can therefore be identical. This stance is in opposition to that of the New Critics, for whom the text itself represents the complete work whose meaning cannot be added to by the subjective experience of individual readers. The more ‘qualified’ the reader, the closer he or she would approach the ideal meaning of literary works.

How educators and curriculum planners position themselves with regard to the main tenets of New Critical thinking and reception theory can have much to do with kinds of assumptions that underlie their own thinking. Teachers who believe that the personal response of readers when engaging with imaginative literature is important to their growth and development, will not favour the view that reading ‘great works’ revolves around discovering the author’s original intention, or ‘unlocking’ the ideal meaning of the text. Reception theory as espoused by critics such as Rosenblatt, Iser and Jauss underpins the notion that the reading is a creative activity, and that the experience of a particular text will be different for each reader. In terms of reception theory, the assumption that generic outcomes can be planned for readings of particular texts, is flawed.

Reception theorists hold a common belief that reading is not only idiosyncratic to individual readers and therefore difficult to predict, but it is also a process that, because of its complexity, cannot easily be apprehended. Whether one refers to personal schemata, horizons of expectations, transactions with texts or personality structures, what happens in readers’ minds during imaginative engagements with texts is not something that can be judged in precise or tangible ways. Apart from illuminating the idiosyncratic and private nature of reading, reception theorists also show that response to texts is not something
that happens quickly and then is over. Response is ongoing, is modified by prior experience of other personal factors, and also modifies new experience.

These aspects of response underpin the three main premises of this thesis and what they imply in an educational context: the unique, intangible and ongoing nature of response means that to predict generic responses as learning outcomes, to monitor these in terms of tangible demonstrations, and to fragment them into discrete units for assessment is highly inappropriate to the nature of aesthetic reading. For this reason, the contributions of reception theorists support the belief that there is a fundamental incompatibility between imaginative engagements with texts and an outcomes-based approach to the teaching of literature.
3.1 Issues in response-based teaching and learning

The opening lines of the previous chapter drew attention to the perennial ‘problem’ that when children read stories, no observable outcomes present themselves for examination by their teachers. The reason given is that reading is an essentially private activity that goes on ‘inside’ one’s head. Chapter Two considered key aspects of reception theory that support the notion of reading as an inner mental process that is unique to each reader. A corollary of this is that, because each reader brings something unique by way of experience, background and personality to the reading of a text, one cannot predetermine the outcomes of encounters with texts, either with single or multiple readers. A related issue is that when the reader is accorded some role in creating the meaning of texts, the literary work is not seen as an absolute or complete artefact with an autonomous existence separate from the experience of the individual reader. Finally, this thesis takes the stance that those aspects of reading that are eminently assessable in an educational context do not say much about the reading process itself. This chapter goes on to explore some key insights into reader response that are underpinned by reception theory, and that relate to the conceptual problem of following response-based reading programmes in a South African outcomes-based curriculum.

It is argued in this thesis that reader response comprises the major part of a meaningful reading process in which the purpose of reading is what Rosenblatt (1982:269) terms “aesthetic”, and that some other areas of literature study that lend themselves to precise assessment procedures are, at best, peripheral to readers’ engagements with texts. The views of literature researchers and practitioners cited in this chapter provide a clear focus on the reader as an active participant in the unfolding of literary texts. Benton (1992:4) comments that all reader-response critics “share the phenomenological assumption that it is
impossible to separate perceiver from perceived, subject from object”. Operating from this philosophical basis, they displace “from the centre of critical discussion the notion of an autonomous text to be examined in and on its own terms” with the notion of “the reader’s re-creation of that text”. In adopting this position, argues Benton (1992:3) reader-response critics dismiss the “Affective Fallacy” posited by the New Critics, who claimed that basing standards of criticism on the psychological effects of literary texts would lead to unfettered impressionism and relativism.

Does this, however, reflect the way teachers view the matter in schools following an OBE programme? The statements of certain teachers from the Port Elizabeth Metropolitan area regarding their priorities and stances in literature teaching are considered in chapter five. Nevertheless, an assumption must be made about response having at least some importance in the overall literature landscape in schools. Stibbs (1991:10) estimates that “response theories are probably the ones most readily acceptable by English teachers” and argues a case for most being “practitioners of response theories whether they know it or not”. Activities such as the keeping of reading journals and the answering of worksheets that probe readers’ feelings and opinions on text-related issues are by no means uncommon. Benton (1992:7) states that “reader-response theory and practice offers English teachers the most coherent position in relation to their work not only because of their inherent appropriateness but because of their inclusive character”.

Most teachers of literature, if asked, would probably agree that the personal growth of readers through their imaginative involvement in the characters and events of stories would feature fairly high on their list of priorities. (Reference will be made in chapter five to the comments of selected teachers regarding such matters.) When making statements about one’s own teaching beliefs and practices, the easier part has to do with the teaching and learning processes themselves and the rationale behind them. The harder part is to give a coherent
account of assessment procedures that are compatible with one's preferred teaching approach, particularly when the latter involves a substantial element of response. Given the 'normal' pressure of assessment requirements in typical school programmes, teachers may well experience some tension between their preferred pedagogy and assessment techniques. Meek (1990:4) recalls her personal experience of literature at school, where there were “accepted ‘right’ answers to deceptively open-ended questions”.

Pressure on learners to produce ‘acceptable’ answers may reflect the pressures, often implicit, that teachers themselves may feel to be ‘accountable’ in their assessment-orientated teaching environment. Peer pressure not to appear too opinionated or to respond too enthusiastically can also exacerbate a situation where saying merely what ‘one feels’ may elicit a cool reception by the teacher. As Rosenblatt points out, however, much more attention should be paid to initial readings of the text. In her view, to think that a reader must first grasp the text cognitively before responding to it aesthetically is an argument “that must be rejected” (1982:273). Jackson (1983:21) shares this stance, commenting that “experiencing the text comes before formal analysis…carrying it into your own world of feeling and thinking…is what must come first”. Protherough makes the point that during initial readings, the reader’s activity is closer to that of a participant, but subsequent readings shift towards detachment, especially as readers mature. What teachers should go out of their way to avoid is first to get readers to do plot summaries and ‘hunt down’ figures of speech before allowing them the chance to engage spontaneously with the text. He also refers to the “alienating” effect on the reader of having to engage in close reading and textual analysis of a work of fiction before knowing the story as a whole (1986:40-41). This kind of “alienating” scenario, with its associated mindset, can easily be carried into the arena of meeting pre-specified outcomes for reading activities in an OBE curriculum. It would indicate, inter alia, a failure to distinguish between learning activities that lend themselves to readily deliverable outcomes and those that do not.
Ideally, teachers of literature should be steering a path between the two extremes of ‘there’s only one right answer or response’, and ‘one answer’s as good as another’, and to help readers to navigate through the waters of immediate to more considered responses. If this does not happen, readers will have little opportunity to develop, particularly if they fall into a mindset where they wonder whether they are thinking or feeling ‘the right things’ about a text – a form of anxiety about whether they are ‘on the right track’. The higher up the school ladder they go, the more likely this is to happen, yet in the Intermediate Phase of the primary school, it is not unknown for readers to have to ‘tell the story accurately’, and be able to deliver potted sketches of characters – work that can be assessed in a reasonably accountable way.

D’arcy (1973:78) suggests that if the writer’s concern is to explore feeling, then it should be expected that the reader responds mainly in an affective manner. In an educational context the reader should be allowed – encouraged, rather – to respond spontaneously to material that is not related to an essentially cognitive task. According to D’arcy, however, most procedures that assess reader response require readers to write discursively. The latter may be an indication that teachers have difficulty in devising appropriate instruments for evaluating response. It may also indicate attempts by teachers to cope with a system that demands a demonstration of tangible, pre-specified outcomes for every learning activity. This can lead to a mismatch between the essential nature of a reading activity and the style of evaluation for that activity. More specifically, one may refer to ‘quantitative’ assessment being applied to an activity that would more appropriately be evaluated in a ‘qualitative’ manner.

Rosenblatt (in Karolides, 1999:165-6) urges teachers to be aware of the differences between the two major stances that she identifies, the “efferent” and “aesthetic”, and not to adopt an inappropriate one. The effects, for example, of taking an “efferent” line in regard to reading a poem could to “satisfy short-term
goals but obstruct growth”. She recalls the time when her daughter was once asked to answer the question “What facts does this poem teach you?” More than forty years prior to recalling this incident, Rosenblatt provided an insight into students’ lack of experience in offering their own opinions about literary texts, even at college level. “Shock and confusion often result when they are asked about the impact of the work on themselves as unique personalities”. This was because they had always learned “hastily to substitute someone else’s experience with the work” (1956:71). It is up to literature teachers to help readers to gain confidence in their responses. Encouraging them to find reasons in the text for responding the way they do is sound practice, a point that has been stressed by Rosenblatt and others, but this should be done after the initial response. Short-circuiting initial response for the sake of delivering tangible outcomes can undermine the reading process as well as the reader’s confidence and enjoyment in responding to texts.

3.2 What literature is, or what literature does?

3.2.1 Products and processes

A major point of difference between the New Critical approach to literature and that of reader-response critics centres on the status of the literary work. Whereas followers of the New Critics would regard a poem or novel as an autonomous entity suitable for objective analysis, reader-response critics view the text as important for the role it plays in interaction with the reader. In this view, the literary work does not have a life of its own outside the experience that the reader undergoes when interacting with the text. Literature and literary study should not be regarded as separate activities. Wellek and Warren insist that they are, observing that the work of art is “creative”, while literary study is a “species of knowledge” (1963:15). If school curricula focus on literary study as a “species of knowledge” rather than something creative, there would be little contradiction
between the commensurate teaching and learning approaches and assessment via outcomes. There would be a more comfortable fit between the two.

Protherough (1983:15) finds greater relevance in the *process* of readers reading and responding to literature than in attempts to define what literature *is*. As he points out in the context of what literature *is* or *does*, literary study “involves not only analytic, intellectual activities but also ones concerned with feelings and attitudes”. Meek (1990:10) corroborates this view, referring to the responses of very young readers as “combining understanding and affect”. Ray (1982:128) argues that the reading of a story “should be an enriching and rewarding experience as well as an enjoyable one, increasing the reader’s understanding of the world, widening his sympathies and stimulating his imagination”. She is here presenting a multi-faceted image of the reading experience, one that implies both quality in the text and a commensurate depth of response in the reader. In a research enquiry with which Protherough was involved at Hull, children offered opinions about their reading experiences. Examples include: “When I read stories I see pictures, whereas when I read other books I collect facts in my head”, “In stories I feel the excitement and different feelings”, and “With a story of my own choice...I try to make the last page last forever” (Protherough, 1983:18).

These examples express fairly blunt distinctions between what happens when children are reading for information (“efferent reading”) and reading a work of literature (“aesthetic” reading), as Rosenblatt (1978:24) terms these kinds of reading. They also focus attention on the importance of what happens *during* reading. Reference was made in the previous chapter to Purves’s observation (Protherough, 1983:15) regarding the multi-dimensional feature of literature study in the sense that it appeals to intellectual, affective, perceptual and psychomotor faculties in the reader, and is hence difficult to ‘categorise’ in school curricula. Multidimensional learning experiences lack the simplicity needed for predictable outcomes and fairly unambiguous standards of assessment of the kind appearing in both the original and new versions of the OBE curriculum in South Africa.
3.2.2 Elements of response in reading

This lack of simplicity is captured in what Benton (1992:32-4) suggests about there being four elements of response in reading. These serve to emphasise the inappropriateness of an outcomes-based approach to literature teaching, together with an associated ‘output-orientated’ methodology of assessment. The first element is anticipating and ‘retrospecting’, where the reader asks questions about how the present set of circumstances arose, what will happen next, or how the story will plan out. Different readers will ask these questions at different points in particular stories. Corcoran (1987) observes that prediction works particularly well with non-literary texts, during reading processes that Rosenblatt (1978:24) would describe as “efferent”, because the reader’s need for information will presumably be satisfied at the end of the text. With literary texts, however, retrospection is more important:

As sentence succeeds sentence, our short-and long-term memories play havoc with what we had carefully read before…There can be no literary reading without a retracing of our mental steps in order that we may proceed again.

(Corcoran, 1987:46-7)

The process described above is referred to in terms of schemata formation by critics such as Iser (1978), and, as is mentioned later in this chapter, is described by Jackson (1983:18-19) as a “backwards and forwards” movement in a story, in which each separate event “is bound up with a sense of what has gone before”.

The second element identified by Benton (1992:33) is that of “picturing” — the picture one gets in one’s mind’s eye of a character or setting. Corcoran (1987:46) points out that it is the gaps in the text that allow the reader to “picture an image”. Similarly, Iser (1978:108) states that a text that is too explicit will not allow for the
“creative side of reading”. Corcoran (1987:46) firmly believes that the ‘creative’ act of “picturing and imaging” lends credibility to readers’ anecdotal responses, as their “analogies and fantasies are constructive ways of rendering the…process more explicit”. He points out that the “strength, significance, and permanence of these images depend, as always, on the reciprocal engagement of sense, emotion, and intellect as reader encounters text and text directs reader”. Being a highly personal process, there can be no uniformity of response as far as picturing and imaging are concerned, and a teacher can merely encourage readers to allow their imaginations to fill in the detail that the author withholds. Such detail can arise from a number of influences such as memory, personal inclination and associations.

Benton’s third activity “is that of interacting with the fictional world at an affective level” (1992:33). Again, personal associations may cause individual readers to react in different ways to situations in fiction that to an extent mirror past events in the life of the reader. A few years ago I discovered just how unpredictable such reactions can be when I observed a poetry lesson presented by a student during a period of teaching practice at a local school. The poem was about a man who was terminally ill in hospital and about how his family tried to adjust to this situation. The poem had an unexpected effect on one member of the class, who, for the first time at the end of this lesson, articulated his feelings about the death, several months before, of his own father. The chances of this kind of response occurring are quite rare, but the incident does illustrate the element of uniqueness that individual experience brings to encounters with text.

The final element of response, says Benton, is when readers evaluate the experiences they are undergoing as they read. This can include reflections about whether they are enjoying the story and why, and about the narrative point of view or the style of the writing, amongst other things. This requires a certain distance from the initial form of response when one is coming to terms with the unfolding events. It need hardly be pointed out that it would be difficult to specify
a reading outcome based on this element of response in view of differing levels of sophistication or even involvement in the story. It would be just as difficult and even more inappropriate to test for outputs in terms of competencies that readers are able to demonstrate in terms of their reading responses.

3.2.3 Modes of engaging with fiction

The conceptual problems of planning and assessing reading response activities within an OBE framework are further highlighted by Protherough (1983:22-4), who suggests that there are five modes of engaging with fiction, occurring in ascending order of complexity. The first is projection into a character, the mode Protherough considers to be the simplest one. The second mode is projection into the situation, the experience of ‘being there’ but without ‘becoming’ any of the characters, “emotionally involved but unable to affect the action”. Associating between book and reader is the third way, which Protherough describes as a two-directional movement in which the readers “visualize the book in terms of their own world, and they imagine how they would feel and act if they were people in the story”. He provides examples that illustrate both directions. The first, visualizing the book in terms of their own world, is exemplified by:

‘Often part of the scene I read about I imagine to be going on at a place I know and am very familiar with e.g. my best friend’s house.’ (girl 14)

‘When I read about other people’s feelings, I try to think to a time when I have had the same feelings and I sort of get involved.’ (girl 13)

The second movement, towards the imaginative experience of being in the story, is illustrated by:

‘I put myself in their position and see if I would think or do the same as them.’ (boy 13)

‘I think what would I do or say in that situation.’ (girl 13)
Protherough sums up this mode of projection in the following way:

In other words, readers may realize the secondary world of the book by importing into it elements from their first-hand experience, or they may use the book as a testing-ground for their own feelings and ideas, or indeed both.

(1983:23)

The fourth mode is that of the distanced viewer, when readers may pity or loathe characters for what happens to them or what they do, but do not get so close to the action as to feel they almost ‘become’ any of the characters. Fifthly, detached evaluation indicates the smallest degree of personal involvement, and is most likely to be seized upon by educators who are more comfortable with the “efferent” stance in reading, and less so with helping students to extend the range of their responses. Protherough raises the issue of why some readers remain “stuck at mode one wish-fulfilment reading, and whether educators “place too obsessive an emphasis on mode five, critical reading” (1983:25).

3.2.4 South African children engaging with Dahl stories

Some ‘local’ examples of the various modes of engaging with fiction follow.² One group of young respondents to the two Dahl stories was a combined class of Grade 3 and Grade 4 pupils (girls and boys). Their teacher, who elicited their responses to *Danny* by means of a questionnaire and subsequent discussion, observed that the children responded with great excitement. The title hero’s “description of himself as a ‘scruffy little boy with grease and oil all over’ completely won them over”; the excitement was “almost tangible” and “they

² In the course of writing a Master’s dissertation on some of the books that Roald Dahl wrote for children, I elicited the responses of various groups of children, aged mostly between eight and ten years. Two texts were identified for detailed responses, namely *Danny the Champion of the World* and *The BFG*. A few ethical issues are raised in *Danny*, most notably the one relating to ‘good’ people poaching pheasants in a rich landowner’s wood. When this issue was raised with a few trainee teachers, they felt it would be “most unlikely that a child would infer that because poaching (an activity remote from everyday urban existence) was “all right” in Danny’s case, then shoplifting, say, would also be “all right” (van Renen, 1988, 7). This assumption was tested by the children’s own responses, inter alia, to this issue. See Bibliography for details of the dissertation (1985).
shared every step of the way to the woods” (van Renen, 1985:70). This reaction resembles Protherough’s first mode of engagement, what he refers to as projection into character. It also exemplifies Benton’s third element of response in reading, namely “interacting with the fictional world at an affective level” (1992: 33). Affective response could include feelings about ethical issues, but in the example of response cited above, “excitement” and a “being with” the young hero was the major element expressed. Although it appears that all or most of the readers felt the same way, it is possible that some individuals may not have been able to identify with the hero or his situation.

In discussing the fourth element of response, that of evaluating their experience while reading, Benton (1992:34) does not refer explicitly to readers’ capacity for making ethical judgements about the situations depicted in the stories. Protherough, on the other hand, states that readers, in the fourth mode of projection, “may pity or loathe characters for what happens to them or what they do”, but they do this while maintaining more distance from the story than would allow them to feel that they almost ‘become’ one of the characters. In their responses to the Dahl story (Danny), the same group of eight and nine-year-old readers displayed an ability to combine, in a sense, Protherough’s mode one and mode four levels of response. They were specifically asked what they thought about Danny and his father going into the woods to poach. Their teacher admitted “some of the children were rather shocked when they heard about his poaching, but I’m afraid in some cases he went up further in the children’s estimation”. She added, however, that the group as a whole was “very impressed when William (Danny’s father) offered to give up poaching for Danny’s sake, especially as he had described how much he liked it” (van Renen, 1988:7).

Two comments seem appropriate here. Firstly, not all of the children in a particular group felt quite the same way about the activity of poaching – only some of them were more impressed because of it. This is a clear indication of how difficult it is to predict the way children’s responses will go. Secondly,
children do seem capable of ‘identifying’ closely with the characters and action of a story while at the same time reflecting on matters of principle, or the ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’ of a case. This does not quite fit in with Protherough’s mode four “distanced viewer”. It is worth noting that the teacher who administered the questionnaire to the above group placed more emphasis on the discussion that this generated during and after, as she was wary of spoiling the “spontaneous feeling of enjoyment and delight in the story” (van Renen, 1985:70). The children could also spark off ideas in one another in an atmosphere of informal discussion, one that would encourage children to voice their thoughts and feelings and not feel constrained by the ‘expectations’ of a formal questionnaire.

Elements of contradiction can also appear, however, as occurred with a group of thirteen pupils whose responses to the Danny story were also elicited. Nine of the thirteen unambiguously saw poaching as wrong, but this did not make either Danny or his father less acceptable to them. What they were like as people was not connected to assumptions about poaching as being dishonest. One child said she admired Danny “because he was such a brave boy. He isonest” (sic); yet further on, when asked whether she thought it wrong of Danny and his father to go poaching, she replied: “Yes because it is the same as being a thief” (van Renen, 1985:71-72). This reflects the general tendency for respondents not to make any explicit connection between what Danny and his father were like as people, and the questionable nature of poaching. All admired Danny and most did not approve of poaching. The student teachers’ belief that a sympathetic portrayal of poaching by the author would not encourage them to believe that shoplifting was “all right” was vindicated, as the general belief of the respondents was that poaching was not right. What is interesting about the children’s replies is that they displayed the ability, intuitively perhaps, and in the context of an exciting story, to place an activity normally labelled as wrong, into perspective. In doing this, they were showing an early ability to deal with moral ambiguity (although not always consciously) and to respond to what is positive in human behaviour. This exemplifies one of the characteristics of quality children’s fiction identified by
McDowell (1973:52), namely that experience need not be oversimplified – “a good children’s book makes complex experience available to its readers”. These readers include those who respond at Protherough’s first level – projection into character, such as the child who indicated that he would like to swap places with Danny for a month, because “his life is like a dream, but I would still like my mother to be along” (van Renen, 1985:71).

The response of a 14-year-old reader to aspects of *The BFG* illustrates the fifth mode of engaging with fiction identified by Protherough, namely detached evaluation. She exhibits a remarkable maturity in terms of her insight and ability to articulate her thoughts. The reader dealt with questions ranging from how she felt after reading the book (“I feel good…It’s such an enthusiastic book…you can really become part of it and enjoy without looking for depressing hidden meanings”) to what she had not realised before (“…how human beings are creatures who kill each other whereas not many other creatures do that”) to what she thought the writer’s feelings were towards his characters (“He obviously has a soft spot for the BFG and admires his courage and honesty”) (van Renen, 1985:68-69). The same respondent showed the ability to sum up the appeal of the book in terms of its simplicity of character and plot, and the descriptions and words used in it…It is a book that bubbles and sparkles! … The descriptions are, as usual, very vivid and the words used, imaginative and exciting. They add colour and a special character to the book. It is written very obviously by someone who understands what children like, and with a sense of humour.

(1985:69)

It scarcely needs pointing out that no teacher can plan an outcome like this. Teachers obviously get to know individual class members and their abilities, but it is very difficult explicitly to teach children how to respond in this kind of way. The teacher’s role, at best, is to encourage and support children to realise their potential through challenging and stimulating them, above all, to be spontaneous
and creative in their responses. This is certainly about what literature does (or can do), if handled with sensitivity and good sense, and is a vital constituent of literature teaching and learning, in balance with knowledge about what literature is. It is a matter of concern, however, that this kind of balance is lacking in the reading section of the South African OBE curriculum. The extent of this imbalance, and what it implies for literature teaching practices, is explored in detail in chapter four.

3.2.5 Evolving interactions with texts - evaluation

One aspect of text-reader interaction, says Protherough (1983:27), is construing of the text in terms of the reader’s “actual and second-order experience of the world”, a process in which any given moment in the narrative is construed in terms of the “accumulated, self-correcting impressions which have snowballed up to that point”. As the reader adjusts his or her viewpoint to the unfolding story, so the different attitudes and perspectives in the story impact upon and modify one another. This is one of the manifestations of schemata formation, as described by Iser (1978:90-92). As Jackson observes:

The reader casts backwards and forwards in the story at the same time, making meaning by actively building inside her head a coherent unity that ties together the beginning, the middle and the ending of the story. Each separate story event is bound up with a sense of what has gone before and what is going to happen next in the reader’s mind so that through the interweaving of anticipations and retrospections a whole pattern of meaning is formed.


This process can be seen at work when readers keep journals of their reading progress or write book reviews, in which they record their impressions at various stages in the reading of stories, make and remake predictions, modify their impressions, and generally express personal feelings, judgements and related ideas. What Jackson describes as the backwards and forwards movement within a text can also occur between texts. A prior experience of a particular text, or of a
kind of text, can induce the reader to think retrospectively or to anticipate on the basis of this prior knowledge. Benton (1992:11), like Eco, refers to a process of “intertextuality”. He considers it “a source of personal growth in literary competence, but also one to be shared and enjoyed with other readers”. He calls it the “reader’s private and public property”, and a “growing mental warehouse of verses, stories, jokes, puns, sayings…and the conventions and language in which they are cast”. Because of this, different readers will have different experiences of intertextuality, which will have a bearing on the impact that their current reading will have on them (or that they will have on their reading). Benton comments that the Ahlbergs’ *The Jolly Postman* is a striking example of a text that embodies a ‘warehouse’ (or perhaps treasure-house) of intertextual allusions within the covers of a single volume.

Formulating personal impressions in reading journals and other formats means that interaction with texts is of an ongoing nature. What Jauss says about the different layers or horizons of expectation (1982:139), or what Iser (1978:90), Rosenblatt (1956:68) and others refer to as the development of schemata or the modification of perspectives, brings one back to the predicament mentioned by Benton (1973). It is that when children read stories, no observable outcomes arise from their reading that can be formally assessed. It might be a simple matter largely to dismiss the affective element of response in favour of an intellectual focus, to maintain that the most ‘important’ aspects of literature are those that reflect it as a body of knowledge, or to see literature and literary study as separate activities. Such options could take inspiration from Wellek and Warren, for whom literary study is “a species of knowledge or of learning” (1963:15), rather than a process involving the thoughts and feelings of readers. The views of the New Critics would also encourage the notion that works of art are complete entities with their own normative structures, into the mysteries of which readers need to be inducted.
What Protherough and others are doing, however, is to demonstrate that the very process of response, and response experienced as a whole person, is highly relevant to the issue of what literature is. This is borne out by the multi-faceted nature of young readers' responses. In their analysis of reading processes and formulation of concepts, reception theorists have argued strongly for a view of what literature is in terms of what it does. And more particularly, what readers do in their transactions with texts.

In the context of assessment in C2005, however, what learners must do in order to demonstrate the achievement of pre-specified outcomes is not a manifestation of a creative activity, as it is in readers’ responses to literary texts. The doing that OBE demands is more a demonstration of competence, shown in activities specifically designed to produce particular outputs. Conceptually, this is far removed from the reader's engagement, cognitively and affectively, with works of the imagination, and where the notion of what the reader does is associated with a creative role.

3.2.6 Paradoxes in the act of reading

In his description of what literature does and what readers do in their transaction with stories, Benton (1992:15-18) sees a number of paradoxes in the act of reading. Collectively they shed important light on the process of reader response and raise significant implications for how reading is approached in educational contexts. Because of the complexity of these processes, the implications have special importance in an OBE environment. OBE, especially as implemented in C2005 and the NCS, is not very indulgent towards ambiguities and other nuances that would compromise the clear-cut nature of the competencies that are planned and assessed.

The first paradox concerns the familiar experience of getting ‘lost' in the world of the book. In becoming detached from his or her own real world and its associated
demands, the reader connects with the ‘secondary’ world of the story. This simultaneous detachment and engagement in a sense enables the reader both to empathise – to enter into the experience of the people in the story, and to observe or contemplate them as an onlooker. This paradox would appear to act as a bridge between the ‘closer’ and more ‘distant’ modes of projection into the world of fiction that Protherough speaks of. Protherough suggests that some readers remain ‘stuck’ in the simpler mode of close association with character or situation, while others advance to modes like the “distanced viewer” and “detached evaluation” (1983:24). Benton, on the other hand, is suggesting that closeness and distance occur simultaneously, hence the paradoxical nature of the process. Although Benton does not explore the pedagogical implications of this paradox, one might deduce that the differing degrees to which individual readers are drawn into the imaginary worlds of texts will have a telling effect on their overall response, both in terms of engaging as a ‘participant’ and their ability to ‘stand back’ and reflect in the sense of an onlooker. This level of response would be impossible for any teacher to predict or control.

The second paradox concerns the reader’s willingness to suspend disbelief, the ability to enter into a world of illusion, where a reader may experience tensions as a result of ‘living’ in the circumstances of a story, yet know that it is not the real thing. The extent to which this happens is bound to vary from reader to reader, hence making for a process that is difficult to ‘capture’ or account for. Corcoran (1987:41) introduces another perspective to Benton’s perception of the paradoxical co-existence of belief and disbelief. He quotes Tolkien’s scepticism about readers’ entering into a “willing suspension of disbelief” on the grounds that readers, in their minds, enter a “Secondary World” created by the author. As soon as disbelief arises, however, the spell is broken.

The third paradox refers to the individual, yet cooperative nature of reading, in the sense that although reading is a private matter, it is a kind of amalgam of what both writer and reader create in their imaginations. What Benton observes
here is crucial to any discourse about attempts to define the results of reading: Reading, says Benton, “is highly individual, with no observable outcome, no finished product for us to examine. The story happens inside the reader’s head...the activity of ‘storying’ is over before it can be articulated”. Benton continues:

The experience of reading fiction is a compound of what the text offers and what the reader brings. If writing is a ‘one-headed’ job (the author with his pen and blank sheet of paper), reading is a ‘two-headed’ experience. The reader creates with the products of two imaginations, his or her own and the writer’s.

(1992:17)

Benton concludes that reading is a ‘virtual experience’, as it belongs neither to the author nor to the reader, as “no two readers re-create the same story and no one reader can ever repeat the experience a second time”. It is therefore not appropriate to speak of what a story is, but rather of what it does, or perhaps what it becomes through the joint efforts of writer and reader. Another way in which the paradox of individual and cooperative processes may be viewed is as both monologue and dialogue – a further paradox, which is based on the idea of an implied dialogue going on between author, reader, narrator and characters. Yet the act of reading is initiated by the individual activity of the reader. Books, says Benton, are “embalmed voices. The reader’s job is to disinter them and to breathe life into them” (1992:17).

A fifth paradox, that reading is both active and passive, connects with the first one in that being ‘lost’ in a book occurs not from the receptive activity of decoding words on the page, but from constructing meaning. Readers are active in the process of creating the illusion in which they believe for the duration of a story, yet submit to the power of the secondary world created by illusion. This paradox reconciles processes described by critics such as Iser (1978) and Poulet (1981), with the former stressing the active and creative side of reading, while the latter ponders his own paradox of the reader being both ‘host’ and ‘prisoner’ of the text.
Emphasis is placed on *individual construction of meaning* in a further paradox about the interaction between recreation and re-creation in reading. During the pleasurable activity of reading, readers remake the story in their imaginations. The latter process implies effort and discipline. The remaking of a story is done again in different ways in subsequent re-readings. Benton identifies a seventh paradox in the unique but repetitive nature of the reading experience, which he compares to individual performances of a play or a symphony. What is repetitive is the invariable text; it is the reader who changes. This could be because of prior knowledge of the story at a second reading, or because the reader has matured, or both. Such changes add complexity to the task of any educator who tries to assess the reading experiences of his or her students. Furthermore, what the reader brings to the story is one side of a paradoxical coin that generates, on the one hand, the activity of ‘filling in’ by the reader, and on the other, the making of abstractions on the basis of what is contained in the text itself. Other critics such as Iser have referred to ‘telling gaps’ that occur in stories, without which, characters and events would be overdrawn, leaving nothing for the imagination of the reader to work on.

### 3.2.7 Principles of response-based teaching

Probst (1988, 33-5) identifies some important principles of response-based teaching that serve to underline the importance of *process* (as in ‘what literature does’) as opposed to *product* (a possible perspective of ‘what literature is’). When considering the injunctions contained in the South African OBE curriculum presently in use, and in the one to be phased in from 2004, it is difficult not to infer that learning outcomes are more concerned with the products of learning rather than the processes. The assessment methodology in the curriculum spells out discrete areas of competency to be demonstrated – in effect, the outputs of pre-specified learning. They correlate with the planned inputs, and because of the intended precision of ‘fit’ between inputs and outputs in terms of outcomes for
which teachers are held accountable, there is a tendency for learning to be fragmented into manageable units for assessment. Learning processes, particularly ones like reading responses, do not lend themselves to being fitted into watertight compartments; they tend to overflow into more spontaneous and complex formations. The elements of response and the modes of engaging with fiction described by Benton and Protherough vividly illustrate how some of the processes in reader response take place. From this it is possible to deduce why OBE is an inappropriate pedagogy for delivering this kind of learning. The following principles of response-based teaching that Probst describes accentuate further the lack of fit between OBE and a reader response environment.

1) Selection of material should be based on what has the potential to interest students or readers, rather than on a notion of what they ‘ought to know’ – a ‘product of knowledge’.

2) The teacher should avoid shaping students’ responses by the nature of the questions asked, hence predisposing readers to a particular line of thought. Discussion should focus initially on students’ contributions and the teacher should work towards helping them to distinguish between what they bring to the text and what they find in it. This assists the student to perceive the difference between experiencing feelings about what is in the text and inferring those of the author or characters. This means that a balance is sought between the reader’s contribution to meaning and what is found in the text – the emphasis therefore being on process.

3) An atmosphere of cooperation that accommodates tentative statements should be created. This is in keeping with a view of literature where meaning is ‘made’ and ‘negotiated’, as in the first specific outcome for the learning area of the Languages, Literacy and Communication in Curriculum 2005.

4) The principles of “relativity” indicate that “there are no absolutes … nonetheless it is possible to have foolish or incorrect readings … language …is held in common and can be shaped by the individual only within
limits, beyond which it is no longer language”. The difference between considered and unconsidered response is that in the case of the former, reflection of one’s own response in relation to the text does take place. Other critics such as Rosenblatt have insisted on this point also. Eco (1990:24) considers that extreme objectivity – where interpretation means to find out precisely what the author intended – and unlimited subjectivity are both examples of “epistemological fanaticism”.

5) The form of response will vary according to the particular experience of a reader. It can, and does, happen that an individual reader finds a special significance in the text because it is associated with a particular episode in the life of the reader. This would be an example of a reader’s personal schemata at work. It may be that a ‘digression’ to this past episode assumes greater importance for the reader at a particular stage of reading than what is actually in the text. This is of little consequence as long as the reader clearly distinguishes between his or her reflections on the text and those on the remembered event. The fact that the text can act as a catalyst for reflecting on a personal episode underlines the unpredictability of response. No one can anticipate when or how an act of reading may illuminate a past non-literary experience of significance to the reader.

The above five principles underline once again the problematic nature of planning reading outcomes on the basis of predicting, or attempting to shape, responses to given texts. The emphasis of these principles is on reading as a process rather than as a product, distinguishing between initial and more considered responses, the “making” of meaning through “negotiation” with the text (and other readers), and on the highly individual nature of personal associations that can be triggered by reading.
3.3 Literature with an ‘agenda’

It was pointed out in the previous section that Protherough (1983:20) sees more value in educators taking note of the process of readers responding to literature than in their adopting stances about what literature is. For him the ultimate importance of the fiction “we read to children or put in their hands” does not lie in any “moral” it may convey, but “in the fact that through it young people are helping to develop a sense of themselves and of their shifting place in the world as they grow up”. Probst (1988:3) corroborates this, saying that when literature touches on some of the issues that “concern and preoccupy” adolescents, they are more likely to respond positively to it. This implies that literature has the potential for offering positive reader engagements with text, and should therefore not be regarded as a potential form of intervention to improve the quality of readers’ minds. If literature were regarded as a means towards ‘desirable’ moral interventions, it would imply a move towards didactic outcomes, which would be inappropriate from both an aesthetic and a pedagogical point of view.

Some books may, on occasion, seem to have particular ‘agendas’. Stories may be generated that address issues of gender or race relationships. Over the past decade and more, many books written in English for the pre-adolescent or young adult market in South Africa feature protagonists who more accurately reflect the demographic realities of the country (Heale, 1994:40). Referring to the situation in South African publishing in the 1980s, Tötemeyer states categorically:

> In order to promote interracial understanding there will have to be many books in which the black is portrayed as an individual who has the same talents, hopes, fears, dreams and emotions as whites; in other works, there will have to be books in which the black features as a main or major character. The child reader, whether white or black, must be enabled to identify with this character, with his feelings and strivings as a human being.

(1988:81)
Indeed, it would not be surprising if publishers took note of this unambiguous commitment to what ‘relevant’ books in South Africa ought to be doing, even more so because of the climate created by the new OBE curriculum. Awareness of social issues appears as an outcome in several learning areas, not least in that of the languages and the social sciences. Personal responses of readers receive very little coverage in the new curriculum, but there are abundant assessment standards for learners to demonstrate their awareness of matters such as bias and stereotyping in fiction. However, selecting titles according to the political correctness of the contents would not be an intellectually honest way of encouraging readers to respond spontaneously to what they read.

Sutherland (1985:145) speaks of different kinds of “politics” that carry ideologies in books. These include the overt and didactical politics of “advocacy”, for example “object lessons” in some Victorian novels, or self-concept enhancement of minority groups in contemporary works. In addition to this line of approach, there are also what Sutherland calls the politics of attack and assent, depending on whether the ideology in the text is seen to be desirable or not. Some of the texts that could be perceived as carrying ideologies may be judged more authentic than others in terms of their quality as works of fiction. Sutherland is of the opinion that most children’s books contain ideology, of one type or another, but that in well-written books, “the author’s narrative skill, imaginative brilliance, and ability to create engaging characters and plot lines tend to mask the ideologies being expressed” (1985:157).

Other titles may appear to an adult eye to be intent on sensitizing readers to their fellow human beings who suffer disabilities, or else offer some form of ‘therapy’ to those who suffer from them. Tucker (1977:3) wonders whether children want to read about the problems they have, and raises the question about whether some books that fall within a category that he calls “bibliotherapy”, offer authentic opportunities for reader empathy. Teachers could be expected to show alertness, first of all, to the quality of such offerings – essentially whether they can stand on
their own as stories that happen to have particular kinds of protagonists and themes – and secondly, to the different degrees of existing social experience and awareness that individuals bring to their reading.

As Protherough (1983:14) puts it, fiction is not an exercise in “explanation or persuasion but a potential experience, the nature of which is in part dependent on the reader”. Not only do teachers run the risk of “debasing” fiction if they use it in an attempt to “instruct” their pupils or make them less biased, but also of riding roughshod over readers’ individuality “and the variety of their reactions”. In South Africa’s Curriculum 2005, many of the specific outcomes make explicit reference to learners’ growing awareness of how South African society has changed and developed, of justice and democracy and “cultural and social values in texts” (DoE, 1997:LLC–3). This could, in a sense, be regarded as an opportunity to approach literary texts with a ‘politically correct’ agenda in mind, and even more importantly perhaps, would help in constituting an easily assessable learning outcome. In terms of what has been described as the core of literary study, however, this could at best be a peripheral activity.

Just how great a travesty of response a simplistic approach would make is suggested by Meek (1990:10), who gives an insight into the complexity of responses that early readers can experience. She refers to the remarkable work by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, *The Jolly Postman* (1986), which allows children to discover that “all texts imply other texts”. This work also provides a vivid example of how, according to Meek:

Response…can never be singular; it is always multiple, layered, combining understanding and affect, involving mental images and gestures for which the surface features of words always seem inadequate. For me, and for the children I know, responses are other versions, rediscoveries, sets of possibilities, hazards, risks, a change of consciousness, a social interaction.

(1990:10)
A simplistic understanding by a teacher of what a book can ‘do’ might produce the idea that ideas or morals are ‘directly conveyed’ through books, and that all a teacher has to do is to place readers in their path, to ensure that the desired effects take place. It may be all too easy to claim that reading promotes moral development or improves readers’ attitudes. Protherough (1983:13) says it would be an unwise teacher who, in the hope of attaining such benefits through a programme of reading, “structured lessons deliberately to achieve them. They are more often incidental benefits that don’t come by planning”. This observation, although directed at ‘therapeutic’ intentions behind lessons, also says something important about the nature of response in general; the impact of particular texts would be filtered through too complex and dynamic a network of schemata for responses to be at all predictable.

Regarding the implications for outcomes-based lesson planning, Protherough’s observation is eloquent. If teachers are expected to plan reading activities in accordance with pre-specified outcomes, they might encounter serious difficulties in the case of response-based literature study. In their attempts to deliver tangible results, teachers may well ‘go through the motions’ of probing their readers’ understanding and engagement with texts (whether this includes elements of a social ‘agenda’ or not), but as Meek (1990:5) suggests, “we cannot take for granted that we know what children do when they read, simply because they answer our questions”. This suggests that the reading process is partly an ‘invisible’ one, as unfathomable as the Loch Ness Monster, to use Benton’s metaphor (1979:69), about which teachers can have little certainty or control. Furthermore, if teachers cannot be certain about what the answers to their questions tell of the readers’ understanding of a particular text, it will be extremely risky to attempt to commit themselves to planning particular outcomes. More details about exactly what the curriculum requires teachers to do in their planning of literature studies will be explored in the next chapter.
D’arcy (1973:9) points out a further dimension of this difficulty when she observes that, despite the ‘noble’ aims professed by certain teachers, the nature of the questions they ask suggests that “they demand from the child a fragmentation of his response”. Such fragmentation is tantamount to ignoring the child’s experience of reading, including “feelings which the writing may have evoked”. In the case of a text having an approved social ‘agenda’, a teacher may focus on one or two specific areas of children’s response in terms, say, of knowledge or attitude. In reality, however, what the teacher may regard as the ‘relevant’ points of focus may have little or no impact on the individual reader. The problem of fragmenting knowledge in an outcomes-based system is one of the key issues being raised in this thesis. Response-based programmes should involve readers as whole people of intellect and emotions, capable of synthesizing new insights into meaningful new constructs, and not merely of mastering discrete units of competence or knowledge.

3.4 Obstacles to response-based teaching

Stibbs talks of context potentially playing an important role in determining readers’ reception of a story, poem, song or other text. He explains this in social, scientific, religious or educational terms of reference, each of which could place a different perspective on how texts can be understood – what Olson (1994) calls the illocutionary force of words. For example, a bar, a schoolroom and a church would each create a different set of expectations if, to cite Stibbs’s example, the words “Once there was a little rabbit” were uttered in each place. Stibbs (1991:27) refers to each context as an “interpretative community” – similar to Fish’s “interpretive community” (1980 b:182). In a similar manner, handing out a novel in the classroom is likely to elicit a very different response to what one could expect if the novel were handed over as a gift. As Stibbs puts it, what will having the book given out at school “tell the recipients about the contents of the text?” (1991:27). Stibbs seems to be implying that students may adopt an attitude of resistance, or at best a mildly negative attitude, one that is probably
‘conditioned’ by long practice of adopting a ‘serious’ approach to the study of the novel. Even worse could be an approach in which novels are used as vehicles for exploring political hobbyhorses or crusades against social bias or stereotyping – the ‘agenda’ scenario mentioned in the previous section.

There could be a discrepancy in attitude towards reading books at home or at school, which would indicate that for the respondents, the context in which they do their reading is important. The reasons, however, could be various. One possibility could be that the types of books typically read at school could differ markedly from those chosen for private reading. Another reason might be that ‘doing’ a book at school does something to it that does not happen during the reading of books after hours, or ‘for pleasure’. In the next chapter it will be seen that in the OBE curriculum in South Africa, reading for enjoyment is one of the aims of reading at school, yet the bulk of the assessment criteria relate to more ‘serious’ approaches to literature. This might well encourage a gulf between school and home as reading environments. If this is the case with some of the learners but not with others, teachers will not have a ‘level playing field’ to work on when it comes to planning lesson outcomes, particularly those related to response. The pupil’s reading background is, however, just one of the variables at play in the process of response.

Teachers may be unaware of an individual pupil’s attitude, or gloss over truly individual responses during classroom activities; they may even be adopting strategies in practice that they do not necessarily go along with in theory. For the purposes of the present research, selected teachers were given an opportunity to express their preferences with regard to a list of priorities in the teaching of fiction, and to say whether they experienced any tension between giving effect to these priorities and what they find themselves having to do within the OBE system. Evidence of tension could be a pointer to educators being under some pressure to produce certain types of outcomes that would not necessarily flow
from what they like to see happening in the classroom, or that would be in the
best educational interests of their learners.

Teachers, says Protherough, are well aware that their pupils respond in a great
variety of ways – emotionally, physically, mentally – to what they read. Children
are apt to express their indignation, revulsion or changes of mind, but educators
may not be comfortable about exploring the reasons for these responses in any
real detail. Teachers, along with their pupils, live in a culture that attaches a high
value to factual or scientific knowledge as opposed to knowledge about learners’
for adopting the “efferent” stance are relevant here. “What can be
quantified...becomes often the guide to what is taught, tested, or researched”. A
common example of this trend is what she calls “the use of stories to teach
efferent reading skills”, which could encourage the view among readers that only
an efferent reading is necessary. This situation is exacerbated if teachers lack
awareness of the two stances. Rosenblatt (1956:71-2) draws attention to a
related issue, that of finding “substitutes” for literature when knowledge about the
literary era, biographical information or literary conventions may supplant
personal engagement with the works themselves. This kind of knowledge is far
easier to assess than the process of engaging critically with the text or reflecting
critically on one’s own response. “Pupils learn to ignore or even distrust their own
responses to literature” or “divert their original interest in literature to studies
around and about literature”. This is more to be expected in the high school
situation, when focusing on knowledge about literature or enhancing the skills of
critical analysis becomes more like an end in itself.

Protherough (1983:5-6) identifies various obstacles to the discussion of response
in the classroom. They are given below, together with brief comments about how
they relate to the conceptual problem being investigated in this thesis.
1) *It is not convenient or easy to assess.* Protherough identifies the lack of clear criteria for assessing reader development in activities such as the deepening of insight, refining of responses, growing critical awareness or maturing of outlook. He suggests that the lack of a clear instrument of procedure for assessment may encourage teachers to rely on instruments used in other subject fields, instruments that may not be appropriate, although they may be sharply focused. An analogous situation is where a teacher uses assessment tools suitable for “efferent” reading in order to assess “aesthetic” reading, because the tools for “efferent” reading are far more precise. In a South African OBE context, this could happen all too easily. Another reason for response being difficult to assess is that the interaction between reader and text is a deeply individual matter that is not easy to articulate with a high degree of precision. A ‘neat product’ is hence not easy to achieve, if at all.

In Curriculum 2005 and its revised version in South Africa, response is occasionally referred to in the relevant sections on language teaching, but little detail is offered as to how this is to be assessed. Further details about this aspect are given in the next chapter. The second premise underlying the conceptual problem identified in chapter one (section 1.2.3) of this thesis is relevant to the problem of assessment raised here. The premise states that a reader’s response to imaginative literature involves inner mental processing that brings in elements of the imagination and prior experience. This premise implies that “the process of reading and responding to texts cannot be equated merely with the acquisition of tangible abilities or competencies. It would therefore be inappropriate to account for the experience of responding to literature chiefly in terms of accomplishments that can be demonstrated at a particular moment” (This thesis chapter one, p.9).

2) *Each reader’s response is unique.* This point relates to the first premise mentioned in chapter one, that the identity and personal experience of individual readers gives unique shape to what they bring to their reading of
the text. This is one of the reasons why it would be inappropriate, if not impossible, to assess response in terms of learning outcomes that are planned in advance. Major authorities in reception theory such as Rosenblatt and Iser describe how individual readers bring what no other readers bring to the reading of texts, and this can range from personality make-up to reading background and preferences. Each individual’s prior knowledge comes into play in a unique manner. Early and Ericson (1988:32-3) refer to readers' use of schemata for “comprehending what they are reading, in making predictions during the reading, and in remembering what they have read”. Each reader manages his or her own process of assimilation and accommodation – “fitting new information from the text into existing schemata”, and modifying “their existing schemata to accommodate information in the text that otherwise would not fit”. This process is unique in each reader. Consequently, when the teacher reads a story to the whole class, “what they are hearing is not the same: each is bringing together what the mind selects from the text with that individual’s existing experience – of life, of language, and of literary conventions” (Protherough, 1983:5).

3) *The responses of the teacher are hard to disentangle from those of the pupils.* The teacher’s own enthusiasm (or lack thereof) can easily influence the way in which young learners respond to a story. It would be ludicrous for teachers to restrain their own enthusiasm for the sake of not influencing the responses of readers in the classroom. How, then, are they to isolate and assess the readers’ responses? Teachers may come to accept that it is not possible to do neat, short-term assessments for each pupil. A child’s involvement with a text is a cumulative, ongoing process of interaction (as stated in premise number three), not only with the text, but also with those who are sharing the experience of the text with the reader. It is not only the teacher who can influence the reactions of an individual reader, but the other members of the class group also.
4) **Response cannot be accurately predicted.** Even when teachers bring their professional judgement and experience to bear on the question of how certain books are likely to be received by young readers, it is not always possible to anticipate their responses. The first premise in chapter one – that the background, identity and experience of a reader can play a significant part in shaping his or her response – relates to this fourth obstacle identified by Protherough. In chapter one of this thesis it is stated that premise number one implies that “readers’ responses to literary texts can differ so widely from individual to individual…that responses are difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate. Planning reading outcomes in advance could therefore be a futile exercise, or at best, an inaccurate one” (Thesis chapter one.).

5) **The peer group has an influence on individual response.** It would be just as inappropriate to try and eliminate the peer group influence over the response of the individual reader, as it would be to suppress the impact of the teacher’s own response to a text. Many children in fact prefer to share the reading of certain books with others because they enjoy sharing a spine-chilling yarn, or in the case of humorous texts, because they enjoy shared laughter. On the other hand, the presence of a class group may be an inhibiting factor because individuals may not wish to betray emotions like sadness, or enjoyment of a story which most of the others find ‘boring’. Teachers who try to pinpoint what individual readers are feeling or thinking may feel frustrated by their changing their minds or being influenced by what others say. This, however, is part of a cumulative process of response. Premise three of this thesis problematises the notion that an end point in reading response can be identified for the purposes of assessing outcomes as ‘culminating achievements’.

### 3.5 Contradictions in literature practice

When faced with the requirement to demonstrate that specified outcomes have been achieved as a result of particular learning activities, teachers may feel the
need to adjust their practice to accommodate this. It could happen that many of those who endorse the value of creativity and growth in literature teaching, find that they are nevertheless directing much of their teaching towards meeting the demands of formal assessment. Reference was made in the previous section to an enquiry, for the purposes of this research, among local teachers in the Port Elizabeth area as to their preferences and priorities in the teaching of fiction. Their responses, which are discussed in chapter five, hold the potential for ambivalent attitudes with regard to principles and practice in their experience. Protherough (1983:8) investigated what a number of teachers believed to be the main purposes of teaching literature, and these were divided into personal, curricular and literary issues. All three, from slightly differing perspectives, placed significant emphasis on the qualities of imagination, understanding and critical values, and the enjoyment and enhanced appreciation and awareness that these could help bring about. From this he pinpoints what he believes to be the “greatest single problem” to be found in the teaching of literature in schools – that “there is an apparent gulf between the responses teachers say they value and wish to encourage and those which much of their work and most of the examining process actually elicit”.

There is a high probability that the problem identified here will seem familiar to a broad cross-section of teachers who know and understand the requirements of a formal examination system, particularly at high-school level. They may have every wish to encourage personal responses on the part of students, and can ‘afford’ to do so through most of the primary school and even into the high school phase. At some point in their students’ high school career, however, they face the need to ‘equip’ them to meet the requirements of examinations that demand some degree of literary sophistication. What readers feel about issues occurring in the texts that they read is overtaken by what they – often in conjunction with, or in emulation of, others – think about matters raised in the text. This can all too often have the effect of producing contrived or insincere responses that appear to meet certain standards or criteria, but do not reflect personal conviction.
Rosenblatt raises the problem of adopting a formulaic approach to analysing works of literature, with a teacher-dominated emphasis on “approved or conventional interpretations” (1978:274). What is thought appropriate for formal examination work shows a shift from “personal reaction to cool analysis”, as Protherough (1983:9) puts it, “and from instinctive evaluation to a carefully learned technique of judgement”. Hansbury (1988:106) refers to Scholes’s view of the teacher’s role in the literature classroom: “Our job is not to produce ‘readings’ for our students but to give them the tools for producing their own”.

Ambivalence with regard to what purpose English, and in particular, literature, fulfils in school curricula, is nothing new. Over many decades it has been more difficult to ‘justify’ or ‘explain the value of literature in school curricula (and in university education) than it has been to defend the teaching of reading skills, grammar and the language conventions. Shayer puts this into perspective with reference to the “classical fallacy”:

Its origin lies in the uneasy transition from the almost exclusive study of the classics as the one true literary discipline to the acceptance of English at the turn of the century, with the belief that despite its pale substitute nature it (English) could be respectable – providing (and only providing) it was treated ‘classically’…the early teacher of English (certainly in the secondary school) was more likely than not a converted classicist… As a result literary study became ‘allusion hunting; grammar (including clause analysis of texts, particularly poetry), figures of speech spotting and paraphrasing…

(1972:6)

Reader response has, as previously mentioned, assumed greater importance in school curricula over the past decade or two. The unclear boundaries between English literature and other fields such as the visual and dramatic arts, and, as Protherough puts it (1986:4) the recognition that the “cognitive and affective are inseparably bound up together”, make language different from other areas of the curriculum. Protherough (1986:6) adds that, according to the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) “examiners are inevitably
tempted ‘to seek out the markable and the objective’, because personal response is too difficult to assess”.

It would be equally unsurprising if literature teachers were to accept techniques of assessment more appropriate to other kinds of learning that embody core processes such as factual verification. As explained by Shayer, the teaching of literature became more acceptable in the early years of the twentieth century through its being made to conform to a vision of rigour more associated with classical studies. Protherough (1986:5) observes, however, that even in the latter part of the century, many literature students, despite the increasing numbers opting for this field, “confess to finding little real pleasure in it, to reading only what is set for examination, and to seeing no real connection between their lives and what they read”.

He asks the question: what are examinations for? It is doubtful whether the reasons frequently offered could provide a relevant or coherent picture from the point of view of response-based teaching. Protherough suggests some of the traditional purposes of examinations: they function as a test of students’ progress or of present achievement, as a means to maintain standards, as predictors of future success and to guide teachers as to what or how to teach, and the success with which they do so. Davis (1998:14) states that assessment helps to facilitate matching and differentiation, a process in which the teacher takes control of setting standards of work in keeping with the perceived cognitive levels of the child. He argues, however, that while formative assessment in the United Kingdom is being used to improve matching of ability levels, it should also be used to “discover the extent of a pupil’s initiative, imagination or motivation, rather than to pinpoint her current cognitive attainments”. As with some of the less ‘measurable’ aspects of reader response, these are the kinds of qualities that should be catered for by way of more creative teaching and assessment methods in curricula such as C2005. It is not merely knowledge that is officially targeted in C2005 and the NCS, but also values and attitudes. Whether they can
be appropriately addressed in an OBE system at all, however, is open to question.

Regarding the use of examinations as a barometer of how effective teachers are in the classroom, Davis (1999:15-16) asserts that this rests on a number of assumptions that need to be questioned. The first assumption is that there is a causal connection between teacher-engineered learning experiences and the changes interpreted as cognitive achievements and that this causal connection can be detected. In allowing a “defensible” version of constructivism, however, on which such causal connections would rest, Davis warns that there are certain implications. These are that “any causal link between teacher input and cognitive gain by pupils must be indirect” and, crucially, that the nature of such links “will vary from one individual pupil to another”. A third implication is that “the cognitive gain will be impossible in principle to identify with any precision”.

To place Davis’s argument into a perspective relevant to this thesis, one ought to bear in mind that he speaks here explicitly of cognitive gains. One could allow that certain categories of cognitive activity lend themselves to short-term, fairly ‘objective’ assessment that could ‘tell a story’. On the other hand, a central tenet of this thesis is that learning activities that are founded on readers’ responses to texts, responses that involve both cognitive and affective processing, are unpredictable and intangible and hence cannot be measured as performances. If Davis is saying that the identification of cognitive changes are subject to questionable assumptions about how they can be engineered and monitored, the implications for assessing strong elements of affective learning are even more daunting.

The second assumption that Davis identifies about examinations as a gauge of teacher effectiveness is that “the envisaged assessment methods do not necessarily distort the nature of the learning objectives and of the relevant teaching in an unacceptable way”. That this assumption is indeed questionable
may be accepted on the basis of the rather familiar pattern of teachers ‘teaching for the examination’, a pattern brought into the spotlight by Protherough’s concerns earlier in this section. The same issue is investigated among a group of local teachers, whose responses are considered in chapter five.

A third assumption identified by Davis is that “successful teaching necessarily will have reasonably short-term consequences or ‘learning outcomes’”. It was stated in chapter one of this thesis that the problem of assessing reader-response activities in terms of learning outcomes rests on three premises. The third premise problematises the notion that an end-point in responding to texts can be identified, or that short-term outcomes may be determined for the reading process. Again, as Davis argues, short-term learning outcomes are not necessarily possible or appropriate even in the case of ‘purely’ cognitive learning. Whether there are any questionable assumptions underlying assessment procedures, or any discontinuity between the latter and the learning outcomes for reading in the OBE curriculum, will be examined in closer detail in the next chapter.

3.6 Conceptions of the literature curriculum

Clearly, the belief that literature programmes should develop and empower learners as individual thinkers who are confident in their own responses and judgement can be undermined by the way teachers respond to the demands of formal examination requirements. In the General Education and Training phase of South Africa’s Curriculum 2005, formal assessment of exit level outcomes takes place only at the end of Grade Nine, so one might expect that examination pressures would not have a significant effect on the ways in which teaching and learning take place in any area of the curriculum before then. There may, however, be other kinds of pressures emanating from the curriculum itself that potentially stand in the way of teachers being able to follow their preferred approaches to literature in the classroom.
Although the position of literature in Curriculum 2005 is studied in some detail in the next chapter, some aspects of the Languages learning area should be mentioned at this stage. The outcomes for the Languages learning area are conceptualised according to the four so-called modes of communication, namely listening, speaking, reading / viewing and writing, to which is added thinking and reasoning. In the case of additional languages, a sixth outcome is added, which relates to the user’s competence in sounds, vocabulary and grammar of the additional language (DoE: Languages, 2001 c:17). This area of the curriculum should, however, be seen in the broader context of curriculum renewal in the country since 1994. The curriculum accommodates a ‘transformational’ vision of OBE, so principles arising from the constitution of a democratic South Africa are embodied in it, and it owes little or nothing, supposedly, to curricula from the previous political order. The languages learning area as set out in the NCS of 2001 serves a variety of purposes, which may be classified as personal, communicative, educational, aesthetic, cultural, political and critical (DoE, 2001 c:43).

In addition to serving these purposes that are based on principles such as identity, relationships, development, communication and power relations, the Languages learning area is also committed to the principles of additive multilingualism. This means that while learners become competent in their additional language, their home language is maintained and developed. There is also a cross-curricular role for language in that it is the language of learning for other learning areas of the curriculum, it promotes reading and writing, and provides the means of conveying information. More broadly still, language study is seen as a means of encouraging “intercultural understanding” and developing the “critical tools necessary to become responsible citizens in a democratic society (DoE, 2001 c:44).
It is clear then, that in the context of political, social and educational renewal in South Africa, language teaching and learning have a multi-faceted role to play, and this is reflected in both the original and revised versions of the national OBE curriculum. While in different contexts and at different times, the teaching and learning of literature may be seen as central to the language curriculum, it would be difficult to describe the languages learning area of the South African schools curriculum in such terms. In the previous section there was some discussion of the ambivalence, over many decades, concerning the purposes that English literature fulfilled in school curricula, particularly in the United Kingdom. In some respects, English became an acceptable part of the curriculum only when wearing the ‘borrowed plumes’ of classical rigour, as it were. Probst (1988:201) refers to a ‘post-Sputnik’ drive to reintroduce more rigour into school curricula, including the notion that English should re-establish connection with its scholarly roots. Yet, at the Dartmouth conference of 1966, the trend towards greater rigour was turned on its head, particularly by the British delegates, who spoke of “encouraging students to respond to the literature read rather than having them analyze it”.

Probst quotes James Britton, who argued against the dominant influence of the critics and their association with rigour and ‘high standards’:

The voice of the critic must not be allowed to seem the voice of authority; more harm has probably been done to the cause of literature by this means than by any other. It is all too easy for the immature student, feeling that his own responses are unacceptable, to disown them and profess instead the opinions of respected critics. And to many teachers, with their eyes on what may rightly go on in other parts of the curriculum, this looks like good teaching.

(Probst, 1988:201)

A pendulum-like movement during the twentieth century between classicist / scholarly / formal / rigorous positions on the one hand, and a progressive / humanitarian / learner-centred / response-based stance, on the other, would have an effect on how literature curricula were likely to be conceived. Probst
(1988:205-8), has identified some models of the literature curriculum. They include the Literary Heritage, the Competence and the Process models. The role of competence as a foundational concept for curriculum will be examined in the next chapter, but it is worth outlining briefly the differences between the three highlighted by Probst.

The Literary Heritage model is based on exposure to ‘great books’ and attention to conventions of genre, form, style and chronology, often in a manner that lacks context. The Competence model, says Probst is popular with educators who argue along the lines that “specifying the behaviors to be produced gives teaching precision”. Literature, Probst continues, “acts on the mind and the emotions, but how its effects may show themselves is uncertain. Whether they will be seen at all by outside observers is questionable”. That the effects of literature can be produced “on demand in the classroom”, he observes, “seems unlikely”. Probst states boldly and unequivocally that “to limit our teaching to those behaviors we can observe and measure is to disregard most of the substance of literature”. This statement needs to be made over and over, especially in relation to literature in an OBE system, with its injunctions for pre-specified outcomes to be assessed in terms of demonstrations of one kind or another. There is nothing new about the pedagogical situation which Protherough (1983;9-10) describes as the “broken-backed curriculum”, where teachers either contrive to avoid teaching the ‘trickier’, more intangible aspects of literature such as response, or else limit their assessment to the more superficial, factual or unambiguous elements – those “behaviors”, as Probst puts it, that can be measured.

A third curriculum paradigm, the so-called Process model, is more in keeping with the nature of response-based literature teaching, but it relies heavily on the skill of the teacher. There is no ‘reassuring’ list of skills or objectives to guide the teachers, who must use their judgement and competence in capitalising on opportunities to facilitate the enhancement of individual learners’ skills, says
Probst. He points out the irony, however, that many advocates of the Competence model are cautious about taking the direction they believe in too far, while the adherents of the Process model are equally cautious about the demands of the discipline itself not being overlooked. Probst believes that a balance between the three models of curriculum outlined above is best embodied in Rosenblatt’s notion (1978:268) of a “transaction” between text and reader. A Transactional model can accommodate concerns for exploring the ‘major issues’ in ‘great works’ of literature, but these must be brought to bear on the lives of students and readers, whose interests at different stages of their lives are a key matter to consider.

Probst raises a number of points for teachers to consider in relation to their own attitudes and practice regarding evaluation and testing. It is suggested, for example, that literature, as a transaction between text and reader, is a difficult subject to test, and that response and reflection do not lend themselves readily to testing, so not evaluating them can be defended, and so on. A modified form of Probst’s questionnaire on assessment was discussed with a small group of teachers at a Port Elizabeth primary school; this is reported on in chapter six. The purpose of the exercise was to focus attention on the nature and role of testing in the field of literature teaching, an issue that is crucial to the problem being explored in this thesis. The fundamental difference between the testing of knowledge and skill in a scientific or technical field, and evaluating of the personal, variable and idiosyncratic nature of literary insight and response, is one that cannot be ignored.

3.7 Concluding comments

The perspectives of the reader response critics that have been considered in this chapter make an important contribution to supporting the main arguments of the thesis. Their contribution is particularly valuable because it is based largely on research projects and teaching experience in school contexts. They highlight
response as a core reading activity; they illuminate the idiosyncratic, dynamic, complex and unfathomable nature of readers’ engagements with creative texts. The reader response critics referred to in this chapter attribute a central and creative role to the reader. They underline the personal aspect of imaginative engagements with literary texts, as well as the perspective that readers respond as whole people of both intellect and feelings.

Their views corroborate and are supported by those of reception theorists with regard to understanding processes such as schemata formation that determine the nature of responses in individual readers. Critics such as Benton, Probst and Protherough refer to potential contradictions between response-based literature-teaching practice and short-term or behaviour-driven assessment procedures. They sketch a scenario in which personal response, comprising a highly individual network of dynamic processes, can too easily fall prey to demands for visible and unambiguous demonstrations of competence and success. They show that personal response is part of a process of learning and growth, and that it is not a product that can be fragmented into convenient measurable units. This is central to the problem relating to response-based literature teaching in a South African OBE context.
CHAPTER FOUR: COMPETENCE, OUTCOMES BASED EDUCATION AND CURRICULUM

4.1 Competence and the curriculum

Referring to the debate in South Africa that preceded the announcement of Curriculum 2005, Jansen (1999:9) claims that the shift from competency to outcomes in the language of curriculum renewal occurred as an attempt to escape the “more obvious behaviourism” implied in the notion of ‘competencies’. This shift, however, is a superficial one, according to Jansen, as the major issues of the original curriculum debate remained in place up till the inception of C2005. One of these issues was the desire to bring together the vocational training and formal education sectors into an integrated system. This would lend support to the principles of lifelong learning, the recognition of competence gained through prior learning and experience, and the transferability of qualifications across traditional boundaries between education and training. The removal of boundaries between these two sectors is also a way of responding to a global economic environment in which higher-level generic skills are more valued in view of rapidly changing technology and markets. Moreover, the integration between education and training could help overcome the Apartheid-induced fragmentation of public life.

According to Jansen, the outcomes-based education proposals as incorporated in C2005 lack conceptual coherence because of a lack of conceptual connection with the earlier competency debate. He suggests that, in effect, the competency arguments have been carried through under the banner of outcomes, and that there is very little, if any, difference between the two as embodied in the national curriculum. In other words, the interpretation of outcomes in C2005 derives much of its conceptual substance from the discourse relating to competency. Whether this standpoint is fully accepted or not, the notion of competence is a significant philosophical base for lifelong learning and OBE as expressed in C2005. In
booklet 4 – *Philosophy* - in the series *Implementing OBE* (DoE, n.d.:23-4), the Department of Education spell out the connection between competence and the critical outcomes underpinning the new curriculum. The critical outcomes have been chosen “because they reflect…the abilities a person needs in order to function well in society…In other words, they reflect a package of abilities that a person has to have to be a competent citizen”. Abilities are hence linked to competence, and competence is described in terms of a person’s ability to apply what he or she has learnt in a variety of situations. “Competence is the ability to draw on a number of different things learned and to apply these skills and understandings in new and unique contexts and situations”.

Competence also means that one should be able to apply more than just one outcome learned to a particular situation. The authors give an example of a taxi driver faced with the problem of a flooded road. “In order to deal with that situation competently, he or she needed to be able to do many of the things described in the critical outcomes”. Examples of these things include the collecting of information about the depth of the water and alternative routes, thinking critically about the information collected, analysing the risk factors, taking a decision and communicating the situation to the passengers. Clearly then, the notion of competence pervades what learners should be able “to know, be able to do, value and be like” (DoE, n.d.:6)– all of which are expressed in the form of outcomes.

C2005 phase documents define competence in terms of the “capacity for continuing performance within specified ranges and contexts resulting from the integration of a number of specific outcomes. The recognition of competence in this sense is the awarding of a qualification” (DoE, 1997 b:13). Because the specific outcomes are derived from the critical cross-field outcomes, themselves based on constitutional principles, there is a ‘golden thread’ linking the broadest constitutional values with the most specific of outcomes in educational contexts.
It is clear too, that competence is the defining concept with regard to how outcomes as ‘culminating achievements’ are to be understood and interpreted.

When considering the place of response-based literature teaching in the OBE system as applied in South Africa, one needs first to examine the centrality of competence in the curriculum, and consider what this may imply for the dimension of reader-response in the teaching and learning of literature. C2005 gives a fairly bland and generalised interpretation to the notion of competence, with the emphasis on the overall ability of persons to function fully and effectively in a democratic society. As mentioned earlier, competence is realised through successful integration of a number of critical outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and values. Understanding is assumed also, as learners express their competence when applying what they have learned in different contexts. The crucial question for reader response is how the inner mental processes that constitute response can be understood or gauged in terms of outcomes that are so strongly rooted in notions of competence. This will be considered more closely in conjunction with a description of the outcomes themselves.

Barnett (1994:14) refers to two concepts of competence, the one being academic and the other operational. He claims that higher education in the United Kingdom is entering the ‘technical’ domain as pressures on it increase to produce graduates who can operate effectively in society. This, he says, promotes an instrumental view of knowledge as it shifts from “knowing as contemplation to knowing as operation”. Davis (1998:26) agrees, pointing out that “accountability for learning outcomes looms large. Economies worldwide are fragile. There is increasing pressure to justify the large sums spent on education”. Similarly, with competence being accorded such a dominant position in the rationale of C2005, the potential is there for schools and higher education institutions to feel pressure to produce ‘competent’ citizens, and to adapt their teaching to do so. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) serves to ‘place’ learning of all kinds and at all levels on a common ‘ladder’, with clear lines of articulation between
one field and another in order to foster transferability and lifelong learning. Interestingly, competence does not have to have been acquired at a formal institution of learning, but can be demonstrated at any time and ‘pegged’ at particular levels on the NQF. In such a scenario, there is often greater pressure for educators to teach towards results that are tangible and demonstrable, than towards those that are more difficult to assess or to measure. “Consequently”, says Barnett (1994:15-16), “terms such as insight, understanding, reflection, wisdom and critique are neglected in favour of skill, competence, outcome, information, technique and flexibility”.

4.2 Accountability and instrumental knowledge

The trend towards ‘Mode Two’ knowledge that Barnet describes in the United Kingdom, knowledge that is flexible and has ‘instrumental’ value of the kind required by competitive industrial economies, has a parallel in South Africa. Recent systemic change in the South African educational landscape is marked by a bringing together of structures that were previously separate. This could well transform vocational training, but on the other hand, it could also reduce formal education to a more instrumental level. Other symptoms of moving towards a more instrumental view of knowledge and learning are responses to the country’s perceived shortage of qualified persons in the field of science and technology and the growing ‘push’ towards ‘massification’ in higher education. The effect of this is to offer a serious challenge to a perceived ‘elitist’ view of education and to broaden its base to be more inclusive and to offer courses that will be more ‘useful’ and ‘relevant’ to society. Thus, learning institutions will become more accountable to the state as to how public funding is being put to use. What should be of concern to people in education generally, and to teachers in fields such as the humanities in particular is that the climate in which they are operating is gradually changing to accommodate a more pragmatic attitude.
Education is considered valuable and therefore worth supporting from the public purse “insofar as it supports the kind of attainment which is relevant to healthy economic performance”, says Davis (1998:12). On the other hand, he expresses fundamental doubts about whether “certain types of important learning can be measured, and whether in principle many of the conventional forms of assessment could possibly be wholly relevant or fair” (1998:3). This has some link with what Davis (1998:13, 23, 38) calls “mistaken ways in which knowledge, understanding, belief, competence, ability and other achievements are being conceptualised”. He distinguishes between “rich” knowledge, which is “understood, usable and applicable” and items of “declarative knowledge” which people may possess and yet be “ill-equipped to use and apply”. Discrete items of “declarative” knowledge lend themselves to being “precisely determined through assessment” (1998:20), but this is doubtful in the case of “rich” knowledge.

What Davis says here has conceptual links with Barnett’s observation about the real possibility of conflating knowledge with information. If society generates the kind of information needed for a healthy and growing economy, universities may come to be viewed as superfluous or out of date. Students can then be seen as ‘customers’ who can ‘buy’ their information wherever they want (1994:41-2). That is one step away from students themselves becoming the ‘products’ of their study. Barnett talks of a “reshaping of knowing in response to the contemporary demands” (1994:43). A given body of information is available to be divided into modules and assimilated by the student, who can accumulate credits up to required levels. Barnett refers to Freire’s analogy of banking to describe the process of selecting and acquiring credits, one of the effects of modularization in institutional learning. The credits are ‘stored’ as in a banking account, but can be ‘retrieved’ or ‘cashed in’ if the student wishes to transfer to another institution. The assumption is encouraged that knowledge comprises “discrete units in the mind and that no advantage is to be gained by attempting to link them. Storage and retrieval occur on a unit-by-unit basis” (1994:129). The South African NQF makes such credit accumulation possible, and in locating learners at particular
levels in their education or training fields, promotes the tendency to quantify learning attainments. Closely associated with this scenario is a suggestion that “the idea of a product carries with it connotations of meeting some pre-specified end, of uniformity of outcome” (1994:43). The main focus of Barnett’s attention is higher education in the United Kingdom, but what he says may have important insights for how learning achievements are construed at school level in South Africa. In the conception of learning described above, “students are literally the product of happenings they encounter”.

But this cannot be a genuine higher education. That implies some active response on the part of the student, to include both an indwelling (Polanyi, 1962) and a dynamic interchange so that the student’s thoughts and actions are his or her own. To allow this, however, is to assert that the educator’s aims can only be a general indication of intentions; they cannot be construed as a set of techniques that will act on the student to produce a guaranteed outcome. Nor will the outcomes be uniform, for each student’s response will be different.

(1994:43)

Barnett observes that competence and outcomes are increasingly being spoken of in education; this may be in order, but “characterizing educational processes primarily in these terms, and deploying these terms as criteria by which educational processes are to be designed and evaluated, are matters of concern” (1994:71). It is also a matter of concern that Curriculum 2005, by prescribing outcomes based on competence, may be ‘excluding’ some important areas of learning that cannot be expressed in terms of these kinds of outcomes. These concerns are rooted in the same fundamental doubts expressed by Davis (1998:3) about whether “in principle many of the conventional forms of assessment” are appropriate to “certain types of important learning”. It is the contention of this thesis that one of these types of learning is response-based literature study. Claims for its position of importance have been made in earlier chapters, but it is only on closer acquaintance with the OBE principles of Curriculum 2005, that the conceptual compatibility between the two may be more
clearly understood. Attention will now be paid to what is meant by outcomes and assessment in the new curriculum.

4.3 Inside Outcomes-based Education: what learners can do

For Spady (1994:1-2), outcomes-based education means “clearly focusing and organizing everything in an educational system around what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning activities”. He defines outcomes as “clear learning results that we want students to demonstrate at the end of significant learning experiences”.

In regard to what learners should be able “to know, be able to do, value and be like” as expressed in booklet 4 (DoE, n.d.:6) of Implementing OBE, however, some of the intended learning outcomes of Curriculum 2005 would not, in Spadian terminology, be regarded as outcomes. These include references to values and attitudes, concepts that enjoy a high profile alongside knowledge and skills in the South African curriculum. Spady states emphatically that outcomes “are not values, beliefs, attitudes, or psychological states of mind”. On the contrary, “they are the tangible application of what has been learned” – the “actions and performances that embody and reflect learner competence in using content, information, ideas and tools successfully”.

This implies that for Spady, intangible qualities such as values and attitudes that underpin human notions of civilised and orderly social existence, cannot be accommodated in an outcomes-based system of education that attaches so much value to tangible demonstrations of competence. That it is indeed accommodated in the South African OBE curriculum points to a possible vagueness or confusion in the local context about how to interpret – or assess – values and attitudes as central elements of outcomes-based education.
Because C2005 defines competence as “the capacity for continuing performance within specified ranges and contexts”, one could argue that this lays the foundation for similarities with Spady’s definition of outcomes. It has already been noted that competence provides a fundamental conceptual harness for an understanding of OBE in South Africa. It is the key concept about which information is provided by means of assessment. At this point one should examine how the notion of outcomes and related concepts are defined in the structure of C2005. Firstly, however, it must be stated that two stages of the new curriculum need to be taken into account. The original version, known as C2005, was first implemented in Grade One in 1998. It will be phased out in favour of the revised NCS, a process that is to be completed by January 2008. This thesis will therefore pay attention to essential features of both curriculum statements.

It will be necessary to examine the conceptual framework of each in terms of how it impacts on the principles of response-based literature teaching. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that work currently being done in classrooms must take at least some account of C2005 until it is officially phased out. Nonetheless, it would be unlikely that some schools or classrooms are not implementing some, if not all, aspects of the new curriculum statement in order to be proactive. What has emerged from the experience of student teachers as well as from discussions with practising teachers is that no two schools – indeed, no two classrooms – are going about the business of Curriculum 2005 in quite the same way.

C2005 offers a terse explanation of the OBE approach: “Outcomes-Based Education should be driven by the outcome displayed by the learner at the end of the educational experience (process)” (DoE, 1997 b:20). This is in keeping with Spady’s view of organising an educational system around what learners should be able to do at the end of their learning activities. It then spells out the kinds of learning targeted: they are knowledge, understanding, skills, values and attitudes (1997 b:20). The inclusion of understanding, values and attitudes means that C2005 has a broader definition of OBE than the one espoused by Spady.
Nevertheless, it uses the word “displayed” to imply that all outcomes must be tangible. While some outcomes in the field, say, of literature may be demonstrated in a tangible manner – it may even be possible to ‘display’ imaginative engagement with fiction if the learner verbalizes it in some way – the foregoing discussion of reader response has strongly indicated that much of what happens is ‘hidden’ and private, and that it is very difficult to predict or to assess in discrete categories. Closer attention to the definition of outcomes and related concepts will reveal the extent of the difficulty vis-à-vis reader response.

Critical outcomes form the backdrop to C2005 as they reflect the “broad, generic cross-curricular outcomes which underpin the Constitution” (DoE, 1997 b:13). Specific outcomes, which in all cases have to be in harmony with the critical outcomes, are derived from the learning areas. The policy document elaborates:

They refer to the specification of what learners are able to do at the end of a learning experience. This includes skills, knowledge and values which inform the demonstration of the achievement of an outcome or a set of outcomes. The focus of outcomes-based education and training is the link between the intentions and results of learning, rather than the traditional approach of listing of content to be covered within a learning programme.

(1997 b:19)

Once again, more is included in the ambit of specific outcomes in this curriculum than is allowed by Spady. One may even detect an inconsistency in the way C2005 explains what specific outcomes are. They specify what learners are “able to do”, but this also includes “values”. It may be quite easy to demonstrate knowledge in terms of what one *can do*, but not necessarily so with values or attitudes – not if what learners ‘can do’ refers to ‘being competent’. (One must bear in mind the close link between outcomes and competence.) Spady (1994:2) explains that outcomes are “what learners can actually do with what they know and have learned”, adding that having learners “do important things with what they know is a major step beyond knowing itself”. He gives an example of students who must explain the major causes of inflation in a capitalist economy.
Not only must they know and understand the causes, but they must also develop the competence of explaining it – hence demonstrating what they can “actually do with what they know and have learned”, as stated above. Mere knowing, understanding, feeling, having an attitude, espousing a value or gaining insight fall short of what is really required of learning outcomes, particularly from Spady’s point of view.

Furthermore, the curriculum document states that the link between the intentions and results of learning is the key focus of OBE, which implies strongly the notion of a necessary correlation between output and input. This leaves little room for the affective and personal dimension in learning, for incidental or spontaneous learning, or learning that can evolve incrementally in ways that are unique to individual learners. It could easily be ‘argued’ that learners could meet an outcome such as “make and negotiate meaning” simply by having a discussion, or that a learning outcome could be worded in such a way (“the learner offers an opinion about a text”, for example) that the mere fact of displaying any opinion or response at all would be enough to say that it had been achieved. The specific outcome for the Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC) learning area that applies most directly to the reading of imaginative literature is the third one. It reads: “Learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts” (DoE, 1997 b:LLC-3). This outcome is broad enough to cover a wide range of response activities, but therein lies the problem. It is so general that any kind or level of response would ‘qualify’.

Even Spady might concede that adopting an attitude towards a social issue could be construed as an outcome, but this would be simply because the learner did something, and did not merely have private thoughts or feelings. Spady (1994:2) insists that when defining or describing outcomes, educators must use “observable action verbs – like describe, explain, design, or produce – rather than vague or hidden nondemonstration processes – like know, understand, believe, and think”. The latter activities, he says “take on the character of a goal".
This raises a potentially important distinction between a planned result, i.e. an outcome, and something that one strives towards, namely a goal. It could be an important distinction in that ‘problem’ concepts such as ‘know’ and ‘believe’ are included with the more demonstrable learning activities, all of which are then accounted for as outcomes. This could be awkward, but there is no other way in which Curriculum 2005 can accommodate those kinds of processes. And outcomes, as we are told, revolve around what learners can demonstrate about their competence in specific areas. So when Spady says that outcomes “are not simply the things students believe, feel, remember, know, or understand – these and other…internal mental processes” (1994:49), he is excluding any meaningful discussion about a significant part of the reading process.

4.4 Performance and values – mixing the signals

In C2005, assessment criteria play a central role in that they state what sort of “evidence” teachers must look for in order to decide whether a specific outcome or an aspect thereof has been attained. The criteria indicate, broadly, “the observable processes and products of learning which serve as culminating demonstrations of the learner’s achievement” (DoE, 1997 b:12). Key words in this definition are evidence, observable, processes, products and culminating demonstrations. The assessment criteria clearly refer to happenings that can literally be viewed as evidence of learning. This must inevitably exclude a considerable range of inner mental processing in readers responding to fiction and other imaginative literature. One might suggest that such processing refers to what ‘really happens’ when people read, whereas surface actions may be quite misleading or so general as to convey very little of significance.

Performance indicators – a further category in the C2005 structure – are intended to provide “much more detailed information about what learners should know and be able to do in order to show achievement. It is, however, “also necessary to ensure that learners have formed opinions and assumed values through their
learning” (1997 b:12). This is compatible with many elements in response to fiction, but this ideal may come under pressure as a result of assessment procedures. The outcomes are regarded as the “culmination” of the learning process and learners need indicators of their progress and success. The performance indicators hence “provide the details of the content and processes that learners should master” (1997 b:17). There are some mixed messages here; the notion that learners should “master” certain aspects of learning does not sit too comfortably with that of forming opinions and assuming values.

The range statements of C2005 indicate the “scope, depth and parameters of the achievement”, but they are also supposed to ensure “that balance is maintained between the acquisition of both knowledge and skills and the development of values” (1997 b:17,18). Again, different signals are being sent out in that outcomes are being aimed at in terms of “achievement”, yet there must be room for the development of values.

4.5 Affective engagements?

It was mentioned earlier that specific outcome 3 (out of 7) makes some provision for aesthetic engagements with texts: “Learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts” (1997 b:LLC-3). The rationale for this outcome is supposedly to “develop a learner’s appreciation, use and creation of text” as an “artistic expression” and to develop learners’ skills in listening, reading and other modes of language communication. The range statements associated with this specific outcome indeed make a reference to the emotions, with various examples of the “enriching effect of texts” being mentioned, such as sympathy, empathy, identification and rejection (1997 b:LLC-23).

Further references to response in this specific outcome occur in the numbered assessment criteria (AC) and associated performance indicators (PI) as follows:
AC 1: Responses to the artistic effects of texts are demonstrated.
PI: will be evident when learners express an initial response to texts.
Levels of complexity: - determined by nature of texts, etc. Responding to:
stories, songs, poems, etc.
AC3: Response to texts is linked to personal life and the lives of others.
PI: Will be evident when learners can link personal life and the lives of
others in responding to texts.
Levels of Complexity: Learners exposed to texts and encouraged to
discuss feelings, self etc. where relevant (’Who am I?’ via ’Who are
y they?’)


There is some discussion of affective engagements in the rationale for LLC, in
which learners “respond with empathy to the thoughts and emotions of others”,
and “think and express their thoughts and emotions logically, critically and
creatively” (1997 b:LLC-2), yet there is only one explicit reference to “feelings” in
all of the above AC and PI.

The framework of C2005 underwent substantial revision during the review
process in 2000. The basic principles (in keeping with the Constitution) and
Outcomes Based Education were retained, but the structure was simplified.
While the critical and developmental outcomes remained unchanged, specific
outcomes (SOs), range statements, assessment criteria, performance indicators
and expected levels of performance gave way to learning outcomes for each
learning area (replacing SOs) and ‘assessment standards’ (replacing the rest).
The revised National Curriculum Statement (NCS) states that “the process of
learning” is “as important as the content” and also claims to leave “considerable
room for creativity and innovation on the part of the teachers in interpreting what
and how to teach” (DoE, 2001 c:18). This may be so, but the essential purpose of
the assessment standards is to convey parameters for the content, as well as the
expected level at which each learning activity is to be achieved in relation to the
relevant learning outcome. What the NCS says here is that there is no
prescription of content or method, but only of outcomes and assessment
standards. Whether there is as much emphasis on doing as there was in
Curriculum 2005 will be considered in the next section. What will be seen, however, is that the NCS has not deviated from the emphasis on demonstrating achievement in observable ways.

In the NCS it is stated that one of the purposes of language is “Aesthetic”, so that the learner can “creatively and imaginatively engage with oral, visual and written literature” (DoE, 2001 c:43). The learning outcome closest to this purpose is that of “Reading and Viewing: the learner is able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts” (DoE, 2001 c:45). This outcome appears similar in range to specific outcome number 3 for the LLC learning area of the earlier Curriculum 2005: “Learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts” (DoE, 1997 b:LLC-3). What is revealed in learning outcome 3 for the languages learning area of the NCS is that there is very limited reference to affective response, which means that the cognitive (intellectual) side of responding to literature is heavily favoured. This represents a significant imbalance in view of the inherent capacity of imaginative literature to appeal to both thought and feeling, a characteristic of literature mentioned by both reception theorists and reader response critics.

This state of affairs may be partly due to the perceived difficulties associated with assessing affective response. It may also be a manifestation of what Rosenblatt (1982:269; in Karolides, 1999:165) calls an “efferent” stance when responding to texts. It also reflects a concern with the critical analysis of structural elements in fiction, as well as knowledge about literary conventions. Similarly, in the assessment guidelines for C2005 that were made available to schools in 2002, none of the examples of specific outcomes, assessment criteria or even the rubric itself, make any reference to the affective domain of responding to literature or language. This may be symptomatic of avoiding what is ‘messy’ or ‘vague’ when it comes to assessment. It patently fails to answer the question of how one is to assess what cannot merely be demonstrated in discrete pre-
selected categories. More detailed reference is made to assessment standards relevant to learning outcome 3 in the next section.

4.6 A ‘broken-backed’ curriculum?

The revised NCS allows the emphasis to fall on what learners should know and be able to do at the end of a grade. These expectations are embodied in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria. The former are described as follows:

A learning outcome is derived from the critical and developmental outcomes. It is a description of what (knowledge, information, skills, attitudes and values) learners should know and be able to do at the end of a grade or more... A set of learning outcomes should also ensure integration and progression in the development of concepts, skills and values through the assessment standards. Learning outcomes do not prescribe content.

(DoE, 2001 c:21)

Like the SOs of C2005, these outcomes describe what learners know and can do at the end of a grade or a phase of schooling. They are not displays of mere short-term accomplishments, and, according to the above definition, do not reflect cumulative learning ‘along the way’. Shorter-term achievements are reflected by the assessment standards, which indicate what learners will be able to do as a result of specific learning experiences. The definition of learning outcomes in the NCS is also in line with Spady’s notion that outcomes show not only what learners know, but also what they can do with what they know – “what learners should know and be able to do”.

There is an element of contradiction in the NCS definition of a learning outcome, however. Firstly, the learning outcomes indicate what learners can do, but they are derived from the critical and developmental outcomes that reflect the balanced, ideal learner in a democratic social order, which presupposes more than mere competence. Secondly, outcomes are said to describe what learners can do at the end of a learning phase, yet it is also stated that a set of outcomes
has a role to play in the integration and progression of “concepts, skills and values”. The latter suggests a more dynamic process than mere culminating achievements. These tensions in the so-called definition of learning outcomes do not promote clarity of vision with regard to the kinds of learning experiences that are regarded as important. Neither do they promote any certainty about exactly what assessment procedures would be appropriate; the less tangible the learning experience, the greater the potential difficulty of assessing it. Kraak (1999:24) points out a paradoxical aspect of OBET (Outcomes-based Education and Training). In an attempt to go beyond the confines of perceived labour-driven competency models, OBET curriculum planners have brought in the progressive pedagogy of People’s Education, which endows what is an essentially conservative curriculum with a certain “legitimacy”. Consequently, this has created “a learning methodology which is simultaneously radical in discursive practice but behaviouralist (sic) in assessment technology” (1999:38). Although Kraak’s observations refer to the earlier C2005, they are illuminating with regard to the sense of contradiction mentioned above. Some elements of the revised curriculum reflect a progressive concern for holistic learner development, whereas the assessment structures, in focusing rather narrowly on demonstrations of performance, threaten to ‘break the back’ of the curriculum itself.

With the emphasis thus falling on what learners should know and be able to do – despite the occasional nod towards more holistic outcomes – there seems a diminished scope for learners to be able to explore and articulate their personal responses in the literature classroom. As Anderson and Rubano point out, when individual responses are explored, they “become more individual the more they are elaborated” (1991:24). This could pose particular challenges for the teacher under some pressure to deliver outcomes that can be demonstrated in a ‘sensible’ manner. Spady (1994:58-9) acknowledges that the less tangible elements of learning and response such as attitudes, values and motivation, although not constituting outcomes per se, do form an essential part of a “quality
performance”, and that they are a “critical ingredient that makes successful outcome demonstrations possible”. He states that education systems do not wish to create obstacles to learners acquiring values, but that it is difficult to determine whether at any given time these inner mental processes are indeed at work within the student. Indeed, “it may be unclear what students actually are supposed to do to show that these processes exist”.

Barnett (1994:75) states that inner mental processes such as understanding can indeed be observed in actions of some kind (as in Spady’s notion of showing what one can do with what one knows), but “we can understand something without showing the external world that we understand”. Barnett’s view could imply that understanding is a feature that is ‘bigger’ than attempts to assess it in a precise manner. Davis (1998:23) is sceptical about subjecting the kind of knowledge which is “understood, usable and applicable” to precise assessment. Clearly, processes such as understanding, insight and imaginative commitment, so central to response-based literature teaching, are problematic in an OBE context. No more so than during the business of assessment.

The assessment standards of the NCS are designed to help educators with this task. They appear to have three functions: to indicate the ways in which achievement can be demonstrated (in terms of depth and breadth), the level at which “learners should demonstrate achievement” (DoE, 2001 c:22), and also the extent to which success has been attained vis-à-vis the relevant outcome. In its Response to Aspects of the Revised National Curriculum Strategy, SAIDE (2001:1) find a weakness in the assessment standards in that many of them are “very specific and atomised”, so that the set of standards yields a “fragmented picture of learner achievement at a grade in the Learning Area, and loses sight of the ‘big ideas’ with which they are associated”.

SAIDE are also critical of the assessment standards resembling a “checklist of items learners must be able to demonstrate in order to show achievement of the
outcome” (2001:2). They argue for a more detailed description of the level of understanding, skill and knowledge, in order to produce a more holistic conceptualisation of outcomes, set in more coherent contexts, as opposed to a collection of discrete abilities. This is in keeping with the principles of both reception theory and reader-response criticism. One of these is that responses relate to readers as whole people of both intellect and emotions, and not to fragmentable items of skill or knowledge that can be demonstrated or performed. Kraak’s criticism (1999:24) of the apparatus of assessment criteria, performance indicators and other means of assessment refers to the earlier C2005, which, he says, practises an essentially “conservative and technicist unit-standards-based assessment technology”. According to SAIDE’s observations, it is possible that the revised curriculum (draft version of July 2001) has not taken major steps away from the position criticised by Kraak. This will be examined in relation to assessment standards for learning outcome 3 of the ‘languages’ learning area of the NCS.

4.7 Assessment standards for learning outcome 3: Reading and Viewing (Draft NCS of July 2001)

In the draft revised NCS of July 2001, learning outcome 3 describes activities or processes in the field of READING AND VIEWING. The learning outcome reads as follows: “The learner is able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts”. (2001 c:122). This outcome is the same for the three phases of the GET band, namely the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phases, as well as for all grades in each phase and for the home, first additional and second additional languages. What differs across phases, grades and languages are the assessment standards.

In the following discussion of assessment standards, reference will be made to grades four to nine only – earlier grades are more concerned with foundational reading and fall outside the scope of this thesis. In the NCS (Languages) the
assessment standards for learning outcome 3 are presented under various headings for each grade, and in three different sections, according to whether the standards apply to English as the Home Language, Additional Language 1, or Additional Language 2. The headings are repeated here by grade.

The headings (DoE, 2001 c:122,124,126) for Home language learners in Grade 4 are: **Responds to South African and international literature, Responds to information texts, Recognises the different structures, language use, purposes and audiences of different kinds of texts, and Identifies and discusses cultural and social values in texts.** In all there are 22 assessment standards under the different headings, and only ONE, listed under the first heading, refers to affective response: “Describes feelings about the text and says if he/she enjoyed it”.

The headings (DoE, 2001 c:123,125) for Home Language Grade 5 are: **Responds independently to South African and international literature, Responds to a range of more complex information texts,** followed by ones similar to Grade 4. These assessment standards total 23, of which, as with Grade 4, only ONE refers to affective response, but adds an analytical dimension: “Describes and analyses his/her emotional responses to texts”.

The headings (DoE, 2001 c:123,125) for Grade 6 Home Language users are: **Responds critically to South African and international literature, Responds critically to information texts,** and the third and fourth headings are much the same as for grades 4 and 5. In all there are 26 assessment standards, of which three refer to the reader’s response, the most direct of which is: “Describes his/her own response to a text and what has influenced the response”. The other two are about readers reflecting critically on themes and relating them to their own lives, and analysing the way writers use language to create response. Two or three of the other assessment standards refer to recognising and challenging
bias or stereotyping, predicting events in texts and responding to emotive visual texts such as advertisements.

In the section for Additional Language 1 for grades 4 to 6 (DoE, 2001 c:160-1) there is only one assessment standard relating to potential response under the heading **Reads for pleasure and information** for Grade 4, and simply **Reads for pleasure** for grades 5 and 6. The assessment standard states: “Reads lots of fiction and non-fiction...”. The overwhelming emphasis in this section (Additional Language 1) is on language skills. This could be a fundamental error, as the thinking behind this would appear to be that as much time as possible should be spent on mastering reading of different kinds, thus relegating personal response to that of a luxury pastime. What is also overlooked, seemingly, is the potential that responding to fiction has for developing the habit and, therefore, the skills of reading. In the section for English as Additional Language 2, there is no reference to reading for pleasure or to personal response, merely to basic levels of skill such as reading and understanding short and simple texts.

Learning outcome 3 for Grades 7, 8 and 9 (the Senior Phase / Junior High) contains no headings as such, but merely lists the assessment standards. Of the 13 listed for Home Language learners in Grade 7, one refers to reading “spontaneously for pleasure and interest” across a range of text types (214), while another requires learners to recognise and present their responses, identify aspects that gave rise to them, and compare them to the responses of others. Reader-response critics such as Rosenblatt (1980) and Probst (1988) also advocate self-reflection and comparison, but for them, this must be preceded by a core foundation of initial response. Benton et al spell out the importance of initial personal responses:

*Articulating* and *reflecting* upon personal responses are fundamental to the reader’s early apprehension of a poem ... At first, pupils may be reluctant to believe that their contributions are as important as those of the teacher, but it is foolish to underestimate how powerfully most areas of the curriculum appear to value memorisation and the passive...
reception of second-hand knowledge. There is a need to convey the fact that, in aesthetic reading, the pleasure lies in the richness of the personal responses that occur, and the challenge in the idiosyncrasy of the process of responding.

(1988:206)

What Benton et al have to say about the importance of initial personal response is just as valid for literature study in C2005 or the NCS. Yet, of the fourteen assessment standards for Grade 8, only one is about reading spontaneously for pleasure and interest, while three others refer to responding, but with an essentially cognitive focus. Examples include analysing the use of images, looking out for “hidden messages” and commenting on “technical aspects of texts” (DoE, 2001 c:217). Grade 9 pupils are expected to read “spontaneously and extensively” (DoE, 2001 c:215), otherwise they respond in similar cognitive style as for Grade 8. In addition, pupils in Grade 9 discuss and compare personal responses to texts. Of the nineteen assessment standards applicable to Grade 9, only the above four bear any relation to personal response, while the other fifteen are mostly analytical in nature.

Reading and responding to social texts such as invitations or letters and reading for pleasure are the sum and substance of any response-related activity for the Senior Phase learner for whom English is the first additional language, while learners for whom it is the second additional language seem to advance very little on what is done by the same category of learners in grades 4 to 6.

The “challenge” relating to the “idiosyncrasy” of individual response mentioned by Benton et al, and the need to encourage pupils to articulate and reflect upon their own personal thoughts and feelings are given only the slightest recognition in a curriculum that is overloaded with measurable expectations.
4.8 Comments about the assessment standards (draft NCS of July 2001)

A few observations about the assessment standards for learning outcome 3 for grades 4 to 9 should throw further light on the problem being investigated in this thesis. Firstly, considering the prominence given to the concepts of enjoyment, responding, emotion and values in the description of the outcome itself (“The learner is able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts”), one might expect these aspects of reading to feature more prominently in the assessment standards for that outcome. Moreover, the increasing attention that reader-response theory and criticism has attracted in pedagogical contexts appears to be overlooked in the way that the assessment standards have been drawn up.

Secondly, all references to response and emotion are cast in very general terms, and it would be a straightforward matter to slot any kind of reader response into the assessment standard and to say that a specific aspect of the outcome had been achieved. That could make sense as long as the reader does respond in some way, and can be seen to be doing so, which would satisfy demands that outcomes be demonstrated by being performed in some way. On the other hand, such vague references to response outcomes would amount to little more than an avoidance of the problem associated with the first premise of this thesis, namely that each individual brings something unique to a reading of a text. Moreover, this is a developmental process (not a product) that occurs over time and has no necessary point of closure (as argued in premise 3 of this thesis). The idiosyncratic and open-ended nature of response means that teachers would find it virtually impossible to anticipate how readers, in general, would respond, and to plan meaningfully for suitable outcomes based on expected responses. Avoiding a potential problem brought about by the individual nature of reader response would not, from a Spadian perspective, be seen in negative terms, as predictability (“no surprises”), competence and evidence of success are
cornerstones of Spady’s philosophy of OBE (1994:42). These features constitute a powerful denial of the reader’s role vis-à-vis texts.

Thirdly, and flowing from the previous point, the assessment standards do not specify just how these responses are to be assessed – to what level of intensity, what level of authentic personal expression of thought and feeling, and what level of sophistication, for example in identifying features in the text that made him or her respond in a particular way. Deacon and Parker (1999:63) argue that when an instrumentalist view of assessment prevails, the focus is on the target itself, on whether it has been ‘hit’ or not. It is an extrinsic item, outside of the learner, who either proves competence in respect of that extrinsic knowledge or skill, or fails to do so. The degree of success matters little. This perspective emphasises the extrinsic nature of knowledge, what still needs to be added to the learner’s “repertoire”. Consequently, outcomes become “highly specific ‘bits’ of skills or information which can be observed and measured one by one and their achievement ticked off on a checklist”. An instrumental view of knowledge and the assessment thereof necessarily simplifies the act of learning to a level where competence may be demonstrated in performance. It might be more accurate to conceptualise the assessment standards for the NCS learning outcome under consideration as goals, purposes, or even aims, rather than standards of assessment for outcomes. The reason for this would be that they make reference to kinds of activity that are too open to be ‘measured’ with any precision. This must, of course, call into question the very notion of outcomes as appropriate means of evaluating what happens when readers read.

Fourthly, some of the assessment standards reflect an element of progression from grade to grade, which is what they are generally expected to do. Under the first heading about responding to South African and international literature, for example, in grade 4, readers are expected to respond, in grade 5 they are expected to do so independently, and in grade 6, to respond critically. The assessment standards falling under these headings do reflect some increase in
the challenge connected with these standards, but none of them spell out exactly how learners’ successes are to be gauged.

Fifthly, although there is some attempt to build progression from grade to grade into the compilation of the assessment standards, the latter do lack an overall coherence that would create a holistic picture of learners engaging with texts. This is exacerbated by the amount of emphasis placed on the skills of analysing emotive texts, learning about conventions of story grammar, pinpointing social issues – in other words a whole list of cognitive activities that ignore the affective power of real, authentic contexts of reading. Although knowledge and use of critical terminology, awareness of biographical background and skill in perceiving story structures have their place and lend themselves to comparatively precise assessment techniques, on their own they do not have much to say about how readers experience fiction.

Sixthly, the preponderance of cognitive activities of the “efferent” type suggests too narrow a view of language as communication. Barnett (1994:41-2) raises the issue of conflating knowledge with information, the latter being a ‘commodity’ increasingly in demand by a society attuned to skills acquisition. Davis (1998:19-20) sees the dichotomy between knowledge and information in terms of “rich” and “declarative” knowledge. The former is the kind of knowledge that learners should be able to apply to contexts other than that in which it was first learned. One should keep in mind that outcomes ultimately relate to the development of competent individuals in society, individuals who – in terms of outcome 3 at least – are critically aware of a wide range of issues in what they read and view. In a country like South Africa where literacy needs are so pressing, it could be all too easy to place so much emphasis on language as a means of communication that it becomes regarded as little more than a means to an end.

Should a relatively instrumentalist view such as this prevail, it would not be inappropriate to reduce items of linguistic knowledge and competence into
discrete units and for them to be assessed as such. Davis (1998:20) expresses doubt, on the other hand, about whether a pupil’s “rich or proper knowledge or skill” is the kind of learning that can be assessed with any precision. The question must be asked whether the languages learning area in either version of the South African national curriculum is predominantly concerned with skills, or whether it also embodies “some notion of growth in the student, some empowerment to use language for purposes of engaging meaningfully and critically with the social environment” (van Renen, 2002:6). The ‘engaging’ with the social environment referred to here is more than just acquiring the skills of analysing and classifying, and more than just cognitive attainments. It includes these, but also more than these, as they must, in the process of reading and responding, be creatively integrated with the holistic and enriching elements of learning.

None of the assessment standards suggests that reading and viewing differ from each other in any way. In a sense, several aspects of reading that are different from viewing are glossed over. One example is the filling in of narrative gaps in the text, particularly through the power of the imagination to create pictures of characters and settings of stories that are not fully provided by the text. Imaginings differ from individual to individual, hence widening the potential gap between responses of different readers. Viewing implies a visual or audio-visual medium of some kind, and the process of viewing has special characteristics that differ from engagements with text, and these should be taken into account.

Finally, the assessment standards do not appear to allow for cumulative growth in ability or skill. The formation of schemata, the readjusting of the reader’s focus, reflections, discussions and reconsiderations do not seem to be afforded any room to move or even to exist, in the context of the assessment standards for learning outcome 3. This has a direct bearing on the third premise of this thesis, namely that response to text is an ongoing, cumulative process with no clearly demarcated point of closure. The kind of assessment or evaluation of the
response process should therefore occur in terms very different from those that target discrete items of knowledge or skill.

4.9 Assessment standards: June 2002

The final approved version of the Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (Schools) was released in June 2002. Some of the changes in the Languages statement will be commented on, with particular reference to learning outcome 3: Reading and Viewing. One change in the Intermediate Phase section (grades 4 to 6) is that the assessment standards no longer give separate attention to reading literary and information texts. The notion of responding to these different kinds of texts gives way, in the latest document, to reading a variety of texts – “South African and international fiction and non-fiction texts for different purposes (e.g. poems, stories, myths, brochures, reference books and text-books)” (DoE, 2002 a:56). The reference to “fiction” as the genre term to cover both poems and stories is of course inaccurate. After the above assessment statement follows a list of different kinds of reading purposes and activities such as comprehension strategies, skimming, scanning, making predictions and reading aloud. There is no reference whatsoever to any affective elements in the reader’s experience of or response to texts in this section.

Another change from the July 2001 document is that reading and viewing are now listed separately among the assessment standards. The penultimate comment on the assessment standards in the previous section was that no distinction is made between reading and viewing, implying an apparent glossing over of some significant differences between them. This has now been rectified. What the viewer has to do in order to achieve the outcome is to view, comment, interpret, identify and discuss – all skills relating to a critical awareness of graphic techniques. Once again, however, cognitive skills are given exclusive emphasis in the range of viewing activities, as they are for the reading. Where is the
appeal, the fun and the excitement of responding to moving images, one might ask.

An overview of the assessment standards for the Reading and Viewing outcome in the latest document for ‘English as a Home language’ reveals that in each of grades 4, 5 and 6, only one of the standards deals with the evocation of the reader’s feelings. In the 2001 document (DoE, 2001 c:122), the assessment standards for Grade 4 specify that the reader describe feelings about the text and “says if he/she enjoyed it”. In the 2002 curriculum, the reader describes “feelings about the text (factual or literary, visual or multimedia), giving reasons” (DoE, 2002 a:56). Having to give reasons is an additional cognitive task in this final version of the NCS. Moreover, the reader’s affective response is no longer to be assessed in relation to literary texts only. This could be a signal that imaginative writing, on its own, is not important enough to be considered separately from “efferent” purposes in reading. The rest of the assessment standards for learning outcome 3 in Grade 4 require the reader to show understanding, to identify, infer, discuss, recognise, respond to information, interpret and select. A similar range of cognitive tasks is expected for learners in grades 5 and 6, with the addition of explaining authorial point of view, analysing and evaluating in Grade 6. The latter grade also requires learners to “critically discuss cultural and social values in texts”, to interpret the writer’s “intentional and unintentional hidden messages”, and to analyse bias and stereotyping in texts. (DoE, 2002 a:61). All of these are, of course, important reading and viewing skills, but here they completely overshadow elements of the reading experience that have been highlighted by reception theory and reader-response critics. “Literature”, says Allen (1980:111), “allows, indeed seeks, the personal response, that kind of attention that makes the book one’s own creation and oneself part of the book”. What is palpably missing from the final revision of the curriculum is evidence of some commitment to the idea that reading offers an experience through which readers can gain a sense of who they are and where they are in relation to what
stands in the text. It is a situation that is particularly serious in view of the fact that readers in the age group of about nine to twelve are being given the message that reading is almost exclusively about understanding intentions and techniques and developing the critical apparatus for coping with this.

The assessment standards for grades 7, 8 and 9 offer an equally bleak picture from the perspective of reader response. There is barely a mention of reading for pleasure, and the notion of responding is tied to purely cognitive tasks. In the latter, critical awareness of implicit messages, and of environmental and ethical issues, is balanced only by analysis of the writer’s point of view, literary devices and other techniques. Knowledge, understanding and analysis are the key outcomes in terms of the assessment standards, yet as previously mentioned, the almost total domination of the assessment standards belies the description of learning outcome 3 per se. This remains unchanged in the final curriculum. It is as if the elements of “enjoyment” and “emotional values in texts” (DoE, 2002:56) have all but been forgotten after lip service has been paid in formulating the outcome.

Learning outcome 3 remains identical for learners of English as either a first or second additional language. The assessment standards, as in the draft versions of the NCS, differ quite markedly from those pertaining to English as a home language. The terms of reference are mostly about understanding – “in a simple way some elements of stories”, such as characters and plot, or “in a very simple way, some elements of poetry”, such as rhyme and alliteration. The same approach is to be found with grade 5, except that the level of understanding in activities such as ‘noticing’ literary features, is a little higher than for Grade 4, and those for Grade 6 a little higher than for Grade 5. Activities such as understanding and suggesting are added to ways in which the learner must demonstrate what she or he understands about a literary genre. In each grade separate attention is given to reading for information, in which simple scanning, summarising and identification of issues is to be done. The final section in the
assessment standards for grades 4, 5 and 6 include reading for pleasure and information, use of reference books and the skill of using a dictionary. As with English as a Home Language, the affective dimension of reading has a very small presence among the assessment standards.

As could be expected, there is a progressive increase in the level of challenge from Grade 7 through to Grade 9. The assessment standards follow a similar pattern in the way they are laid out, with concerns such as identifying figurative devices in poetry, identifying the author’s purpose and point of view in fiction or non-fiction texts, and analysing “messages” and emotive language in advertisements being given ample coverage. Reading for pleasure and for information in reference books appears after the above. All of the items listed here apply to Grade 7. For Grade 8 one can add a slightly advanced level of identifying, explaining and assessing, with the addition of critically analysing and a more sophisticated grasp of sentence structure and social texts for Grade 9. One cannot therefore escape the conclusion that reading, even for the user of English as the first additional language, is an altogether ‘serious’, left-brained, skills-dependent business.

Very little need be said about the assessment standards for English as a second additional language. In this context, “authentic texts” refer to items such as CD covers or brochures, and not, for example, to well-crafted works of fiction. Critical viewing is restricted to advertisements; merely getting learners to read seems to be an assessable achievement in itself. The assessment standards for grades 4 to 9 are very similar to those in the July 2001 NCS document. In both, the building of vocabulary and graded reading are given some priority.

In conclusion, one can say that the learning outcome relating to reading and viewing reflects an overwhelming commitment to a vision of competency that learners would require to function effectively in a modern, democratic society. From this emerges a view that knowledge is ‘useful’ and that reading is a
desirable set of strategies and skills that will enable individuals to cope with the features of modern life. Again, there is nothing wrong with equipping learners with empowering language skills, but if Rosenblatt, Iser, Holland, Protherough and many others are to be believed, then a core element of the reading process is being by-passed in terms of how the standards of assessment – the functional core of the curriculum – are selected and set out. Undoubtedly, the kinds of preoccupations in the field of reading and viewing as presented in Curriculum 2005 and in the various stages of the revised NC, point to a heavy emphasis on cognitive reading activities. Not only do they do this, but they also offer plenty of scope for demonstrations of competence through unambiguous assessment techniques. These assessment standards also reflect a firm basis for planning predictable reading outcomes in the languages learning area.

4.10 Narrowing the focus of knowledge versus reader response

Anderson and Rubano (1991:3) argue that, in the United States at least, a preoccupation with reading skills such as identifying the main idea, summarising, skimming and scanning has shifted the focus away from holistic reader response. An over-emphasis on analytical and knowledge-based aspects of literature study has led to a situation where, in “testing the reading of literature, the ingredient most often lacking is questions that assess student ability to respond aesthetically”. The question ought to be asked, however, whether it is feasible, conceptually and practically, to be “testing” the ability to “respond aesthetically” in an OBE context. This is an issue of fundamental importance, as teachers may wish to include aesthetic response in assessment portfolio, yet avoid doing so because of conceptual or procedural obstacles they may perceive. If this occurs, those same teachers might also find little incentive to allow room for response in their teaching, and opt for more convenient “efferent” approaches. This would only be encouraged by the heavy weighting given to analysis of and knowledge about particular genres of literature (apart from ‘informational’ texts) in the assessment standards for Reading and Viewing in the NCS.
One could argue that the South African OBE curriculum has contrived to narrow the focus of learning activities towards assessable items of knowledge, particularly in terms of the assessment standards for reading. Ryan (1999:22) raises a similar issue, although in a quite different context, in respect of the scholastic aptitude tests (SAT) for American colleges. He is highly critical of the SAT for “rewarding the mindless ability to take trivial tests, when the object ought to be to create really educated minds”. In a sense this reflects a similar concern, expressed for example by SAIDE, that the assessment standards of the NCS (2001) reflect a fragmented view of knowledge, and not a coherent picture of learning. Morrow (2001:89-90) points out that a “competent engagement” in an activity “is not merely the sum of these atomised elements” – elements that make a person competent in a particular field of activity. Seeing only the sum of the different parts of competence is based on a view that knowledge can be classified and placed on a taxonomical scale. Morrow adds that although we can “specify some of the elements of the practice of good teaching, it is not possible to make the practice entirely explicit”.

The ‘pedagogy’ of Curriculum 2005 and the NCS suggest a vision of lifelong, empowering and coherent learning processes, but in order to produce “really educated minds” one must take account of the kinds of outcomes that will result from unified learning contexts, and not settle for outcomes and means of assessment that trivialise learning. Jansen (1999:152) draws attention to the shortcomings of Curriculum 2005 in this regard. Not only is the content of the curriculum ‘trivialised’ in the sense that very little detail is given, but “OBE trivialises content in another way: it threatens to atomise and fragment curriculum knowledge”. He adds that by “organising knowledge around discrete competencies, OBE overlooks the important cross-curricular and interdisciplinary demands encountered in learning a complex task”.

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Interestingly, Harley and Parker (1999:183-4) draw a distinction between competency-based assessment and outcomes-based assessment. The former relies on the assessor’s inferential judgement during observation of a learner’s performance, while the latter relies on measurement of explicit tasks according to clearly specified standards of assessment. Jansen, on the other hand, states that the developers of Curriculum 2005 moved away from an overt competency model to an outcomes-based model in order to distance the curriculum from any connotations of behaviourism. Whether the assessment technology of the new curriculum was equally to have escaped such connotations is difficult to tell, but a constant position taken in this thesis is that the assessment of outcomes in the field of reading – whether in Curriculum 2005 or the NCS – does not capture how one should evaluate, or judge, what is essentially a complex process, rather than a pre-determined product.

Malcolm (1999:91) argues a case for ‘knowledge’ underpinning the Australian view of OBE, as the emphasis is more on what learners should know than on what they can do. Learning “takes place in the mind and expresses itself in many ways, of which performance is one”. Because learning takes place in the mind, says Malcolm, assessment “is achieved by inference, not measurement. Performances are not the measure of learning, but clues about what and how students think” (1999:90). Do these observations throw any light on some aspects of how OBE is interpreted in South Africa? Malcolm is of the opinion that it is not clear where Curriculum 2005 “fits on the scale of organic to mastery learning” and that the policy documents are “equivocal” about what levels of performance are expected of learners in determining whether they are successful or not in terms of the outcomes concerned (1999:103). The curriculum indicates certain areas in which learners are to demonstrate that they have succeeded in achieving a particular level of competence. It does not, however explain exactly how educators are to determine whether learners have succeeded in their allotted tasks, still less, *how well* they have succeeded; that is up to educators to work out for themselves. The very difficulty associated with this matter can,
however, deflect attention away from an important conceptual issue: just what and how much in the field of aesthetic reading response should be subjected to the kind of assessment that determines the success of an achievement?

The degree with which educators genuinely gain a sense of what their students are achieving may have much to do with their experience and judgement, but also with their understanding of the kind of knowledge they are working with. It is fairly clear that instrumental knowledge can be mastered through skilful regulation of input, but that knowledge in a wider context cannot be reduced to measures of performance or behaviour. Liston (2002:78) refers to a tendency on the part of many teachers to approach reading as a means to relate “pictures of the world” to students rather than to facilitate the process of “inventing shared worlds”, which would be a more open-ended process. This places a greater emphasis on a “curriculum of cognition” than a “curriculum of being”. This observation is relevant to the issue of the South African OBE curricula failing to give recognition, in the Languages section, to the question of ‘being’, in the sense that the kinds of skills that are so clearly targeted there reflect a heavy bias in favour of intellectually focused criteria, even in terms of literature study. Response-based learning, and what it implies for the involvement of pupils as whole beings of intellect and emotion, is largely ignored.

Barnett (1994) refers to different kinds of knowledge, for example knowledge that is understood and can be applied, and the level of knowledge that is associated with information – a kind of instrumental knowledge. He also distinguishes between different kinds of competence, such as ‘academic’ (the traditional domain of universities) and ‘operational’ (the kind that is valued in modern competitive economies). A clear picture of the kind of knowledge valued in the OBE curriculum in South Africa does not readily emerge. Signals in the curriculum about what kind of knowledge is important in reading suggest an overwhelming bias towards knowledge and skills. Teachers may interpret the assessment standards of the NCS, for example, quite literally, and approach
virtually all types of reading in terms of having what Rosenblatt calls an “efferent” purpose. Teachers may do this unwittingly, or do so in the knowledge that this kind of approach creates easier opportunities for assessment within an OBE framework.

Much of what Barnett (1994:106) has to say about understanding and knowledge bears strongly on the kind of mental processes that characterise response during reading. He speaks of a “lived quality” to understanding, and unpredictability about the nature of the changes that result from learners’ experiences. This is a key observation in terms of premise one of this thesis, that reading response is not the kind of learning process that can be made to fit into pre-determined outcomes, given the unique and therefore unpredictable nature of what a reader brings to the text. Barnett argues that the concept of competence cannot accommodate the existential quality of understanding, the moments when learners feel differently after reading a certain text, or have come to a new understanding. This is essentially because understanding is a personal thing. Barnett refers to Polanyi’s notion of “personal knowledge”, worked through different layers or levels of understanding. Understanding can be built upon, refined and extended – hence the “rich” quality that Davis (1998) speaks of. These views of understanding and knowledge relate closely to concepts such as schemata and their importance in understanding what happens during readers’ engagements with literary texts. Competence, on the other hand, tends to be measured as either adequate or inadequate in terms of pre-specified standards. It, unlike understanding, is an all-or-nothing affair.

Barnett also speaks of understanding and discovery as being “subversive” (1994:107-108). Exploring alternative ways of understanding a concept or problem lessens the hold that any one form of understanding has over a student. One can also see how such a principle can operate in the context of reading fiction (or perhaps potentially controversial non-fiction). Fiction that has any power has the power to challenge, and very often it is the nature of a reader’s
response to challenges that creates ‘grey areas’ in attempts by curricula to define what it is that readers should be ‘learning’. On the other hand, a preoccupation with the ‘objective’ elements of literary content, structure, genre and conventions enables the teacher of literature to steer clear of issues about which it would be difficult to predict outcomes. While there is some emphasis in the NCS on critical awareness of elements such as bias or stereotyping in literary texts that could spark debate, there is little scope for genuine “transaction” with the text that allows for significant input from the reader.

Barnett (1994:108) argues that the process of exploring alternative or “subversive” ways of understanding is not a “content-based form of understanding, but a dispositional form of understanding”. The educator is challenged to bring about a change in disposition, as it were, and to pay attention to process in education. Polanyi talks of one being able to “know more than one can tell”, which challenges educators further, to help their students become aware of understanding that they may possess, but of which they are unaware. This ‘knowing more than one can tell’ is at odds with what Morrow (2001:89) refers to as a ‘dream’ of transparency espoused by OBE. Once outcomes have been decided upon, “education will become transparent” to all concerned, but this dream is based on a “shallow, one-dimensional view of knowledge – the assumptions that all knowledge stands at one level above unmediated experience, and can be made explicit”. So while some aspects of knowledge can be ‘boxed’ into laboratory-controlled experiments, others cannot – the kind of knowledge Polanyi calls “personal”, what Davis calls “rich” and what Barnett suggests is “subversive”. The “one-dimensional” view of knowledge would have the focus on objects or items of knowledge itself, rather than on the experience being undergone by the learner. It could be concluded that an OBE curriculum that gives priority to pre-determined outcomes and tangible standards of assessment would be more concerned with what the learner produces, than with the quality of the experience itself.
4.11 Concluding comments

The dichotomy between “personal” and more instrumental views of knowledge mirror the contrasting stances of the New Critics and the reader-response critics with regard to what is important in the act of reading. In the way it handles language issues, particularly literature, South African OBE curricula do not project a spirit of inner, personal growth in the individual, or a tolerance of ambiguity or divergence. Competence has been identified as the broad foundation on which local outcomes-based curricula have been built. This carries with it connotations of learner achievement being evaluated in terms of measurable performance, supported by criteria that test for outcomes in terms of tangible and clearly demarcated products for assessment.

The discourse of C2005 and the NCS is clearly at odds with that of reception theory and reader response criticism. While the former are preoccupied with the planning, delivery and assessment of predictable, generic outcomes, the latter are concerned with the facilitation of processes that encompass much that is of a spontaneous, personal and intangible nature. The critical outcomes of the OBE curricula do articulate the importance of outcomes that target not only skills and knowledge, but also attitudes and values, but the overriding concern is about producing competent citizens who will be able to function effectively in modern society. This concern is solidly buttressed by an apparatus of assessment that leaves little room for anything but visible demonstrations of competence. The content of the curriculum in the Languages area also contains little that gives explicit encouragement to reading as an activity that promotes personal engagements with texts.

The examination of C2005 and the revised NCS in this chapter has revealed much that is disturbing from the point of view of reader response-based approaches to the teaching of literature. The discourse of the curricula points partly in the direction of holistic learning in which the learner plays an informed
and active role. What it says regarding outcomes, however, undermines the notion of learning as an integrated and dynamic process. If the core business of outcomes is to produce clearly assessable, pre-determined demonstrations of competence, and this is what C2005 and the NCS appear to be saying, then the concerns raised in the three underlying premises of this thesis are vindicated. There is a fundamental mismatch between reading approaches that involve highly individual, essentially intangible and ongoing processes of response, on the one hand, and a curriculum that targets pre-determined, generic and tangible measures of competence, on the other.
CHAPTER FIVE: THEORY AND PRACTICE – TEACHERS’ RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE (APPENDIX 1)

5.1 Rationale for the questionnaire and selection of respondents

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was designed as the first step towards obtaining input from practising teachers with regard to their preferred style of teaching literature within an OBE system. I wished to investigate how teachers thought about what they did in the literature classroom. It was important for me to find out how much value they attached to response-based teaching and learning, and its relative importance in their general literature teaching practice. If it emerged that the majority of teachers gave a high priority to approaches and strategies that encouraged personal response and imaginative engagements, I would have some basis for investigating whether they experienced any incompatibility between what they believed in and what OBE required them to do. My argument in this thesis would then be put to the test. If, for example, they (or some of them) actively encouraged reader response, and experienced some tension between doing this and complying with OBE injunctions, it might provide evidence that the problem of conceptual incompatibility was indeed creating difficulties in the classroom. This finding would support the argument of this thesis, provided that the reasons for the tensions did relate to the issue of incompatibility between intangible learning processes and the delivery of tangible learning ‘products’.

If, on the other hand, some of the teachers valued reader response but experienced no tension or incompatibility in relation to OBE practice, it could indicate that they were not getting to grips with the conceptual implications of their practice, or that they were finding some way of minimising or avoiding requirements such as planning outcomes or selecting and matching assessment criteria and performance indicators. It could perhaps indicate that they were not doing enough literature teaching for the incompatibility issue to be a problem, or
that they were distracted by other difficulties of a more pressing nature. It could, of course, also imply that I would have to re-examine or modify my argument in the light of my findings. Although I did not expect that every response of every teacher would unambiguously support or refute the argument in this thesis, I was looking for information about where teachers saw themselves in relation to the teaching of literature within the parameters of OBE. I was also looking for evidence of whether the conceptual problem I had identified did or did not play a significant role in how the teachers experienced their task in the classroom.

Regarding the selection of respondents, all of the fifteen respondents are teaching English in grades where Curriculum 2005 is being implemented, or they have done so in the past. Some teach in the primary school and others in the high school. In the latter context, teachers tend to specialise in one or two subjects or learning areas, whereas their primary school colleagues are generally responsible for a wider range of learning areas in the curriculum. This would probably mean that for the primary school teachers, English is but one of several focus areas in their teaching, unless they also happen to specialise within a subject field, as sometimes happens. The primary school nevertheless offers greater opportunities for integration between learning areas, a process that is encouraged by C2005. It is likely that the amount of attention that English, in particular imaginative literature, might be given across the curriculum would depend to a large extent on the preferences of the individual teacher. The amount of time allocated to English in the high school could be greater than in the primary school because it is taught by a subject specialist and because there is likely to be less integration with other learning areas. The intensity of the focus on readers’ engagements with imaginative literature would most probably depend on the individual teacher, but the pressures of formal assessment would have some influence, particularly in Grade 9.

I approached a few teachers with whom I am personally acquainted, and most of them volunteered to request their teaching colleagues to complete the
questionnaire too. I did not attempt to make my sample of teachers ‘representative’ in any way (other than that both primary and high schools were involved); my chief concern was to elicit the honest and considered thinking of people who have been implementing C2005 in functional, reasonably supportive contexts. It was important that respondents had been operating in situations that offered them a reasonable chance of success. Dysfunctional environments would hamper effective curriculum implementation and would be likely to distract teachers from reflecting on their core business.

The questionnaire reflects a qualitative approach, rather than one in which the elicited information could be quantified in some way. The emphasis is on detailed, personal responses to fairly open questions, rather than on responses to pre-specified answers such as multiple-choice items. In encouraging teachers to talk about their practice, I wished to establish (1) where they stand in relation to key issues in the teaching of literature, particularly in an OBE environment, (2) whether they experience any tension between learner-centred, reader response-type activities in the teaching and learning of fiction, and the need to teach towards pre-specified outcomes, and (3) if they do experience such tension, how they deal with it. The notion of “tension” goes wider than actual personal experience of not being able to reconcile conflicting principles. Tension also refers to recognition on the part of the teacher that there are grounds for perceiving conceptual incompatibility between reader response and OBE assessment, an incompatibility that has the potential to create tension in classroom practice even if it does not currently do so.

The fact that there are fifteen respondents and several sections and sub-sections in the questionnaire has resulted in a large amount of information being elicited. I include as much detail regarding their responses as I judge to be necessary in order to give a qualitative account of their individual perspectives that have a bearing on the arguments driving this investigation. The teachers’ responses are
described and analysed in the following section, which is in turn divided into appropriate sub-headings, each containing a rationale, findings and conclusions.

5.2 What teachers were asked and how they responded

5.2.1 Background information

Rationale:

Teachers were requested to give their school a rating with regard to its level of readiness and resources for implementing OBE. Although implementation per se is not being examined in this thesis, it is important that teachers focus on the conceptual issues of OBE and how they relate to it, and do not allow logistics to influence their thinking. Reference was made in chapter one to the degree of support that a school gives to its staff as being a potentially significant factor in how teachers might experience curriculum innovation. Logistical and other kinds of problems could deflect teachers’ attention from core issues such as the conceptual basis of their teaching in an OBE curriculum. A school that is poorly resourced or inadequately prepared, by virtue of the qualifications of its staff or lack of exposure to and engagement with the new curriculum, can have a negative impact on individual teachers’ responses to teaching literature in an OBE environment. Clear self-reflection on this matter is essential if balanced commentary is to be hoped for or expected.

The number of years of language teaching experience can give an indication of the kind of base on which teachers are likely to have developed confidence in their professional practice and personal judgement, but it can also be a factor in resistance to change. Experience across a range of grades can be a significant factor in broadening the teacher’s conception of the developing learner, and of implementing OBE at more than one grade level. Formal assessment at higher levels introduces a further dimension.
Findings:

There is a good balance among the fifteen respondents between well-established teachers and those who are relatively new to the profession. This could be quite important in terms of attitudes towards OBE. To some, it could represent an unwelcome intrusion into comfortably established practice, or it could provide something ‘new’ and refreshing. Newer teachers, on the other hand, would need to ‘take on board’ the new curriculum from near the beginning of their teaching careers. In all cases, however, experience in OBE ranges only from a year to two or three years, according to grades being taught or when Curriculum 2005 was first implemented.

BS and MJ, both experienced teachers, are colleagues at the same high school, although their perceptions of their school’s readiness to implement C2005 are “good” and “average” respectively. AP, SM and NH are colleagues at another high school, with twenty-two, ten and five years of overall teaching experience respectively and consider their school to be adequately prepared for the implementation of C2005. AH is the only respondent from a comprehensive school, which she rates as “poor” in respect of coping with the new curriculum. She has taught in both the primary and high school sections, but C2005 in the primary section only.

WW, CVA, CT, LJ and WF are from the same primary school, which has been proactive in exposing its teachers to C2005 from the beginning. The number of years of individual teaching experience in English among the five respondents ranges from six to thirty-one. Four colleagues from another high school, ML, LE, M-AL and YN make up the complement of fifteen teachers who responded to the questionnaire. Most of them rate their school’s preparation for OBE or C2005 as “adequate”. None of the four has been involved with C2005 for more than a year.
Conclusions:

This section of the questionnaire on its own does not offer very much substance on which one can base any significant conclusions. Responses to later questions, however, do reveal that the number of years of experience in teaching English does not necessarily have a bearing on a teacher's attitude to C2005. For example, AP and SM are both experienced teachers (at the same school) and both project negative attitudes to C2005 overall, while the four respondents mentioned in the previous paragraph are generally open and positive, citing their lack of experience with OBE as a reason for giving fairly positive but superficial answers. One should therefore disregard length of service as a factor.

There is a fair consensus among teaching colleagues regarding their school's preparedness to implement OBE. This suggests that teachers are at least seeing their school in the same light, and that they are not being too subjective or feeling isolated when it comes to this matter. The fact that only one of the schools was given a poor rating for preparedness is an indication that fourteen of the fifteen respondents have had a reasonable, if not good, chance to come to terms with OBE and C2005 from the point of view of resourcing and support. This will therefore not be a factor in determining what attitude they adopt.

5.2.2 Rating scale for priorities in literature teaching

Rationale:

This instrument invites respondents to express their personal choices with regard to the teaching of fiction. It is intended to elicit initial information about the value that the teachers collectively attach to creative response-based reading activities as compared to teaching and learning approaches of a less open-ended nature. A number of possible activities in the teaching and learning of fiction are listed in
conjunction with a five-point scale. Although the study of reader response in this thesis applies to more than just the genre of fiction, I decided to limit the statements on the rating instrument to fiction only, hoping that this would help respondents to focus more sharply on their philosophies and practices.

The items are listed quite randomly, and a preponderance of answers that indicate either strong agreement or strong disagreement would have no statistical significance. What would be of some significance, however, is whether responses reveal a general consistency in approach on the part of individual respondents. A consistent response would, for example, not be likely to give the highest endorsement to both tangible evidence of factual recall and the development of imaginative responses to texts. Equally, one would not expect a respondent who endorses tangible evidence of outcomes to express any tension in relation to OBE assessment requirements when responding to items later in the questionnaire.

On the other hand, it is possible that some teachers could embrace a broad range of outcomes for the teaching and learning of fiction, from mastery of the most ‘testable’ of items to matters of personal growth. There could be various reasons for this, including a lack of awareness about the conceptual implications of some of the practices they endorse. This could have a ‘blunting’ effect on this particular investigation, but ultimately, a more serious consequence could be the lack of opportunity that the pupils themselves would suffer if teachers fail to engage intellectually and responsibly with the challenges of teaching literature within a curriculum driven by expectations of competence. Another scenario could be that teachers endorse certain approaches to teaching literature, but focus on quite different aspects during assessment – an aspect of what Protherough (1983) terms a “broken-backed curriculum”.

The activities listed in this instrument were not labelled A to R in the original questionnaire as distributed to the respondents, but were later added to facilitate
analysis of the findings. The amended version, with alphabetical lettering added, appears in Appendix 1. For the purposes of discussing the findings, the activities (A to R) are grouped according to certain common features, although this was not the sequence in which they appeared in the questionnaire. The groupings are presented in the next sub-section.

Item 3 of the instrument enquires about respondents’ experience of the 5-point scale. If any of the respondents found the scale unhelpful in any way, it would be important for them to indicate the reasons for this, as any difficulties might impact on the usefulness of this section of the research instrument.

Findings:

The findings can be described and analysed from two perspectives: 1) according to each item (A to R) or grouping of items in order to show overall trends, and 2) according to the choices made by each respondent, which could be revealing about how individuals make their overall choices. The results of the rating scale that reflect the total distribution per item are presented in tabular form in Appendix 2.

The findings per item / grouping, prefaced by a brief outline of what each focuses on, are as follows:

A, B, G:
The structural features of stories are included – grasp of factual information; ability to summarise events; understanding components of fiction as genre. There is some consistency in the weightings given to these items in that for each of A and G, a 4 or a 5 rating accounts for thirteen of the respondents’ choices and nine in the case of B.
H, I, R:
Linguistic ‘spin-offs’ fall in this group – using text as a point of departure for grammar study, creative writing or debate; converting from narrative to other format, for example drama and expansion of vocabulary. There is a marked discrepancy between the very high rating given to R – expansion of vocabulary – and conversion from one text genre to another, with use of text as a springboard for other language activities somewhere in between. Fiction is therefore seen as a reasonably ‘useful’ activity in that it can serve other linguistic purposes.

M:
This item is about aesthetic awareness – what constitutes quality fiction in terms of story construction, characterization, style, and other elements. This receives a fairly gradual distribution from a 5 rating (five respondents) right down to a 1 rating (one respondent). This suggests that opinion is divided, although ten of the fifteen respondents give this priority a 4 or 5.

C, F:
These items are concerned with intellectual engagements – making inferences; predicting events and language features in context; insight into relationships; cause and effect, and the like. These two items are placed in a 4 or 5 category by twelve and eleven of the respondents respectively. Making inferences scores higher than predicting.

D, E, K, L, N, O, P:
All of these have to do with personal responses, imaginative engagements and growth – connecting story to readers’ own life experience; exploring issues, making judgements, becoming involved; understanding other lives and customs; growing in self-knowledge; exercising imagination and creativity; and reflecting on the way they respond to text. All seven of these items are placed in either a 4 or 5 rating category by between twelve and fourteen respondents. This indicates
that the great majority of the respondents give strong endorsement to the learner-centred, response-based activities involving imaginative engagements, intellect and feelings. Scarcely one of these activities drops below a 3 rating.

Q:
This item deals with social aspects – communicating in groups; discussing ideas; making comparisons; cooperating with others. Respondents also give strong endorsement to this ‘spin-off’ of literature activity.

J:
This item concerns assessment – finding tangible evidence that outcomes are achieved; structured assessment to mark readers’ progress. Like M, this activity receives support from a rating of 5 right down to 1. With six respondents allocating a 3 or lower, this literature activity fares the worst of all eighteen on the list, just slightly behind M, the priority relating to literary discrimination.

Conclusions (item-based findings):

Firstly, there is an indication that knowledge-based structural elements of fiction are considered important, hardly less so than open-ended, response-based pursuits. This suggests that teachers value a balance between what can be learned in an ‘objective’ and a ‘subjective’ fashion. Recalling of factual detail does not fare quite as well, which is in keeping with the relative lack of enthusiasm with which the teachers responded to the giving of tangible evidence of achieving outcomes through structured assessment. This trend reinforces the positive endorsement given to imaginative engagements, personal response and reflection.

Other activities that give emphasis to more intellectually rigorous processes such as making inferences and predictions are supported, although not quite as well overall as the ‘response’ cluster of items. All in all, the responses to this part of
the questionnaire provide enough evidence that respondents attach significant value to the “aesthetic” side of literature teaching and learning, which in turn provides a valid basis for testing the hypothesis that there is a conceptual incompatibility between reader response activities and OBE teaching and assessment procedures as manifested in C2005.

The findings and analysis according to the choices made by each respondent are as follows (the findings are presented in full in Appendix 3):

There is no strong tendency in the response of BS towards either ‘tangible’ or ‘intangible’ processes in fiction teaching. Overall, however, she indicates a commitment to learners’ ability to articulate their own reflections and to have a sound knowledge of conventions relating to fiction. Nevertheless, there is no evidence of a predilection for response-based teaching.

The ratings awarded by MJ reflect a reasonably balanced approach, with preference going to mastering of story structure, inferring meanings, knowledge of literary conventions and discussion. A relatively poor rating is given to providing tangible evidence of learning outcomes through structured assessment.

AP gives the highest rating to almost all of the activities in fiction, but distinguishes between grades 8 and 9 in the amount of importance she attaches to two of the items - “Demonstrating knowledge about elements of story” and developing “literary awareness … about quality and non-quality reading”. She gives both items a higher rating for Grade 9, which is an indication that this grade is destined for more ‘serious’ business, and may point to an implicit belief that the higher the grade, the less spontaneous engagement with and response to texts there will be. This is partly the concern expressed by Anderson and Rubano (1991:3), who lament the heavy emphasis on analytical aspects of literature study, and the tendency, during assessment, to neglect questions “that assess student ability to respond aesthetically”. Rosenblatt (1982:272) also draws
attention to a belief that young children should have a cognitive grasp of a text before they respond to it aesthetically – a belief should be “rejected”. On the other hand, AP gives a low ranking to one of the activities that Rosenblatt (1978:24) calls “efferent” – to “understand and recall events or important factual details accurately”, which is consistent with the high priority attached to other items such as comprehension, creativity or imagination.

In contrast to her colleague AP, SM attached more varied levels of priority to the listed items. Recalling events and giving tangible evidence of attaining outcomes were poorly rated, while the highest priority was given, inter alia, to forging links between texts and readers’ own lives and describing their own responses to texts. This indicates a higher priority being attached to imaginative engagements and growth in understanding, along with grasping the elements of story..

NH, a colleague of both AP and SM, gave the lowest ranking to giving “tangible evidence of having achieved specified outcomes through structured assessment”. She added: “to me, unimportant, but it has become a major occupier of time nevertheless”. This gives a clear signal that the recording of tangible outcomes is a potential cause of tension for NH, one of the problems identified in the thesis. Activities to which she attached higher priority reflect a balance between cognitive or skills-based activities, and affective processes.

NH, SM and AP all adopt a relatively negative stance towards achievement of outcomes being demonstrated by tangible means. This stance lends support to the second premise of this thesis, namely that responding to text involves inner mental processing, which in turn implies that precise standards of outward assessment are inappropriate.

The only priority item to which AH accorded a poor rating was “understanding and recalling factual events or details accurately”. The next lowest rating was for comprehending overall story structure and ability to summarise events, while all
the others were ranked higher, which reveals an overall consistency. WW, one of five colleagues from the same school who responded to this questionnaire, places most aspects in rating category 4. She attaches the greatest value to readers making connections between texts and their own lives and growing in understanding of others. This indicates strong support for an “aesthetic” stance. Like some other respondents, her lowest ranking goes to assessment by producing tangible demonstrations of achievement, hence raising the possibilities for problems with OBE assessment procedures.

The choices made by CVA are very close to those of WW. LJ’s response is interesting in that she positions all but four of the eighteen items in the highest category. CT offers the most extraordinary set of choices of all the respondents, particularly in the ‘mixed bag’ of very different kinds of items that she rates poorly. Like CT, WF appears to favour a spread of cognitively and affectively demanding activities, but he does give a more discernible weighting to imaginative and affective engagements.

ML, one of four colleagues at a high school, places all but two of the priority items in the highest category. M-AL goes further, placing only one aspect in category 4, with all the rest given a 5. This approach to selection is unhelpful in that it leaves very little room for drawing conclusions about preferences. The choices of YN and LE are more varied, without revealing much about particular preferences, although YN does place imaginative and affective interactions in the highest category.

Conclusions (choices per respondent):

There are several instances of apparent inconsistency or contradiction within the choices made by individuals, but whether these stem from a superficial grasp of some of the concepts underlying the priorities is not always clear. These inconsistencies may imply that teachers acknowledge the importance of
individual and personal response to fiction, yet either teach in an “efferent” manner suited to formal assessment (a scenario that Rosenblatt warns against), or teach the way they prefer, but in order to comply with OBE assessment requirements, test for something else in examinations. Protherough (1983:8) refers to an “apparent gulf” between the responses that teachers say they value and encourage, and “those which much of their work and most of the examining process actually elicit”. Some of the responses to this questionnaire that give high priority to testing for tangible evidence of achievement as well as imaginative engagements and response suggest this scenario.

This may or may not cause teachers to experience tension with regard to their practice, but there is a real possibility that the pupils may suffer as a result of inadequate opportunities being given for them to explore, reflect, reconsider, share and develop their responses, a process that requires ample time and space. On the other hand, the results of this survey show an overall consistency with regard to the low ranking awarded to the giving of “tangible evidence of having achieved specified outcomes through structured assessment”, and to the relatively low ranking given to understanding and recalling events.

Although there is strong overall endorsement for response-related activities overall, as reported in the previous sub-section, many of the individual responses lack a persuasive tendency either towards reader response or to less knowledge-based types of activities. Teachers probably feel some pressure to ‘cover all bases’, or as many of them as possible, within the OBE of C2005. Nevertheless, there are signs that some respondents attach higher priority to imaginative engagements, (for example, SM and WF), while NH’s additional comment that providing tangible evidence of outcomes, although becoming a major occupier of time, is “unimportant”, indicates a clear critical stance.

One should bear in mind that respondents were not initiated into the conceptual issues underpinning this enquiry. They were asked to indicate their teaching
priorities, which, presumably, is what they did. The fact that many of them attached value to a broad band of activities that accommodated several apparently contradictory elements, does not cancel the fact that they did give their endorsement to the multi-faceted processes of responding imaginatively to texts.

Finally, the literature teaching priorities rating scale would never be adequate on its own, as the responses do not provide conclusive evidence of teachers’ overall choices with regard to “aesthetic” or “efferent” stances. It was not intended to do this, or to encourage teachers to convey personal attitudes towards any of the possible activities. It was designed as a means for teachers to indicate what value they attach to particular types of fiction-teaching activities across a fairly broad range. This would indicate whether any teachers who endorse certain approaches might have to carry out certain OBE-related tasks that are conceptually at odds with some of their preferred approaches. The results of this exercise clearly indicate that this is the case. Whether this would cause any tension between principle and practice, however, cannot be ascertained on the basis of this response alone. The first opportunity that respondents had to enlarge on what they said was in the following section on how effective they found the rating scale.

5.2.3 Effectiveness of teaching priorities rating scale

Rationale:

If any of the respondents found the scale unhelpful in any way, it would be important for them to indicate the reasons for this. Any difficulties or reservations with regard to this section might impact on its usefulness, particularly if respondents could not relate their own practice to the items listed. The latter could be the cause of an inaccurate, distorted or contrived response. It would be important not to replicate, with this instrument, what some teachers may
encounter with C2005, namely a ‘going through the motions’ of something they feel obliged or compelled to do. This exercise could perhaps provide teachers with the opportunity to confront such a problem, although this would be more likely to happen later in the questionnaire.

Findings:

BS feels she is being “idealistic” in her choices, as “only a few really respond well”. To some of her learners “reading is such a chore and a slow one at that”. MJ implies that an important aspect of fiction in the classroom has been omitted from the list, that of enjoyment. She would have given a 5-rating to literature being “enjoyed and encouraged”. AP admits to “waverering on the second question. Of course one does not want them to get their facts wrong. I just would not stress that aspect”.

SM feels that she could cover more of the important things to do with fiction in the classroom if she did not have to bother with so much paperwork. NH’s response echoes that of SM to an extent, as her responses reflect what she wants to do in the classroom, and what she believes “should be done”. She notes that there is a gulf between what she wants to do and “what I end up doing (i.e. what must be done)”.

For AH, the rating scale did articulate important issues in literature teaching; she observes that it is “far more valuable assisting learners to make connections, give own ideas and use their imagination”. This is a clear endorsement of what Rosenblatt (1999:165) terms an “aesthetic” stance (imaginative engagement) as opposed to an “efferent” one (knowledge-based). WW comments that the list clarifies many points that have become “subconscious” in her teaching. CVA finds it helpful because it reminds one of why literature teaching is so important and “how much it covers”. LJ finds it an opportunity to give an accurate indication of her priorities in teaching fiction. CT finds it helpful because “although I do all
these things I have never actually ‘named’ them”. WF finds it helpful in giving a ‘retrospective’ view of the categories that take up most of his class time, and in enabling him to see where his priorities lie. “I never consciously set out to make them priorities”.

ML found no difficulty in determining her priorities from the list, while MAL finds it helpful in highlighting the most important priorities. LE considers the list to be quite comprehensive, and YN finds it helpful in making her reflect on what she finds “important in literature”.

Conclusions:

The overall response to the teaching and learning priority list is quite positive. No one admitted to finding it irksome, presumptuous or unrealistic. Several of the respondents say that many of the aspects reflect what they would like to do, or should be doing, if so much of their time were not taken up with completing obligatory administrative tasks to do with language teaching. This is an indication that what is given approval in principle is not necessarily feasible in the reality of classroom practice. There is also an indication that practical constraints may discourage teachers from reflecting on the principles underpinning what they do. The rating list appears to have struck a chord in most of the respondents, nevertheless, who give general affirmation to processes involving imaginative engagement with texts, as well as other activities that cannot merely be quantified in terms of precise outcomes.

5.2.4 Possible obstacles to teaching the preferred way

Rationale:

Prior to this, respondents have indicated their preferences in relation to certain teaching options, have commented quite positively on the process of doing so,
and now have the opportunity to comment on possible difficulties that emerge in practice. Question 4 of the questionnaire is as follows: “Have you in practice been able to give effect to your preferred way of teaching fiction, or have you encountered obstacles to doing so in the day-to-day realities of classroom teaching, through Curriculum 2005 restrictions or other factors? Please elaborate.”

It presents the first overt suggestion that Curriculum 2005 may be among a number of factors that could impede teachers’ progress in teaching according to their preferred ways. It has already been revealed that administrative paperwork was proving a hindrance to teachers who wished to do more creative things in the literature classroom. Question 4 flows from the two previous sections. This is directly aimed at testing the hypothesis that fostering reader response in an OBE context may cause tension because of irreconcilable elements in that situation.

**Findings:**

BS encounters no significant obstacles and feels that teachers work “naturally” towards specific outcomes and that teaching fiction “allows for this”. It would be as well to bear in mind that the specific outcomes of Curriculum 2005 are broad enough to accommodate a comprehensive range of teaching and learning activities anyway. BS makes no reference to the more detailed lesson outcomes that would inform particular practices at a given time. The rejoinder of her colleague MJ is very different. “The necessity” she comments, “to assess specific factors, and to present physical evidence of such is a major source of stress for me”. This is an eloquent endorsement of her response to item J (about tangible evidence of outcomes) on the rating scale. MJ’s response directly answers the first point of the rationale for eliciting the responses of practising teachers – to establish whether they experience any tension between essentially learner-centred fiction teaching and the need to teach towards pre-specified outcomes.
AP observes that with “too much paper, pre-reading, pre-assessing going on”, teachers “never knuckle down and engage with subject matter as we once did”. This echoes remarks by her colleague SM about too much paperwork being associated with literature teaching. SM herself feels that Curriculum 2005 is restrictive because of all the portfolio (written tasks for continuous assessment) requirements, which means that one does not get to “discuss texts enough” – the same point made by AP. This problem is exacerbated in the Senior Phase (in which AP, SM and NH teach), as a more ‘serious’ attitude is adopted towards assessment. It is at the end of this phase (early high school) that formal assessment takes place for the first time for the awarding of the General Education and Training Certificate. The comments made by NH in relation to question 3 are carried forward into this section. She observes that OBE, as informed by Curriculum 2005, “has, for most part, frustrated my efforts to be what I call a good teacher”. She spends more time on a “paper chase” in order to “demonstrate outcomes” than on “real stuff” in relation to texts. This view is consistently expressed on more than one occasion, giving shape to the notion that having to deliver outcomes for reading creates obstacles, through lots of paperwork, to ‘real’ teaching.

The frustrations experienced by AH have more to do with poor availability of suitable texts than with OBE. WW offers the perspective that the only limitations in her experience are brought about by her having to teach all learning areas. Literature is consequently often “pushed aside” to make way for “more important” work. She notes, however, that the overall integration between learning areas in OBE “serves to promote abundant reading”, but would include reading for “efferent” purposes also.

WW’s observation is partly mirrored in CVA’s complaint that “time is a significant obstacle”. She adds that reading is “one small aspect of language teaching and therefore is limited timewise”. Her colleague CT is somewhat ‘upbeat’ in her observation that her school “does not allow obstacles”. They are encouraged to
experiment in Grade 5. They “read novels as class readers” and other stories, and there is “always discussion”, but they “do not actually teach fiction”. The latter comment could quite possibly imply that they do not deal with fiction in an analytical way; in the priority list, however, she does award item G – knowledge of the formal elements of fiction – a high rating of 4. Her comment therefore needs further elucidation. WF found some relief from external strictures in the “lack of directives from both National and Provincial education in the early stages of OBE”, which allowed him to explore his “own agenda and so I was able to be much more creative and link the material to the children’s ‘real lives’ and not some textbook related vision of what the department saw as Utopian”.

ML finds the only obstacle to be the “poor literacy levels of learners”. M-AL finds no obstacles other than time – the same factor mentioned by LE. The fourth member of this ‘quartet’ from the high school deviates a little from the others. She observes that significant obstacles include “classroom management, administrative duties that tend to kill the joy in literature, and an increasing decline in learners’ aptitudes for reading for enjoyment”.

Conclusions:

Several respondents indicate that the paperwork associated with demonstrating outcomes as prescribed by C2005 is a significant obstacle to teaching the way they prefer. However, one can read a little more into this, as NH, for example, draws a distinction between demonstrating outcomes and ‘the real stuff’, and she finds that OBE has frustrated her efforts to be what she considers a “good teacher”. (These remarks are enlarged upon in the course of an interview with her, reported in chapter 7.) There is a sense that although several teachers direct many of their remarks at the burden of paperwork, they are also frustrated by the nature of what they are required to do, hence intimating that conceptually, they are at odds with some of the things they have to do. In MJ’s case, the need to “assess specific factors, and to present physical evidence of such”, and which is
a “major source of stress”, refers to more than just the paperwork involved. Here then, are a few cases where respondents are being quite explicit about the nature of the work – apart from the additional burden it imposes – as being a source of tension and frustration. This provides quite significant evidence that there is a degree of conceptual incompatibility between creative and open-ended response-related teaching and learning, and the need to fragment learning into discrete units for demonstrating the achievement of pre-selected outcomes.

Other frustrations are occasioned by time limitations, to a large extent imposed by the need to integrate reading with other learning areas in line with OBE policy. Neither this nor the problem of “poor literacy levels of learners” adds anything new or relevant to the issue of incompatibility, although both are factors that can create pressures strong enough to deflect teachers away from focusing on core activities in the literature classroom.

5.2.5 Attitudes and policies regarding worksheets

Rationale:

Worksheets are instruments by which OBE-style assessment can be carried out; but they are also useful for setting creative tasks. The focus on commercially produced worksheets gives respondents the opportunity to say what they find useful about them in the context of OBE and C2005. Respondents also have the chance to talk about making their own worksheets and possibly why and when they do this. Ultimately the issue about worksheets is connected with the need to work towards specified outcomes, hence its inclusion in the questionnaire.

Findings:

This section drew a variety of responses. BS is positive about the scope that worksheets offer for providing tangible evidence of understanding achieved.
Barnett (1994:106) states that “we cannot predict exactly what changes in understanding will result from students’ learning experiences”. Worksheets, on the other hand, can be based on some prediction of changes that may occur in understanding as a result of learning, and tests for such changes. MJ cautions about the pitfalls of worksheet “overkill”, as well as the practical constraints of preparation and assessment time associated with worksheets. This view would find sympathy with AP, who is “beginning to lose patience with them”. She says, “my best OBE teaching is resourced from the class themselves”, but does not elaborate on what she means by “OBE teaching”. It is instructive that the “class themselves” should provide the best source of OBE teaching, as this implies that little by way of precise planning geared to particular outcomes would take place. For AP, interaction with and between learners provides the substance for worthwhile learning.

SM regards worksheets as being important, but feels that too often they become conduits for providing evidence of learning for a portfolio of continuous assessment tasks. She finds published worksheets frequently “idealistic” and “impractical”. No further elaboration is given. NH considers worksheets useful, as they allow, inter alia, for easier assessment, but almost always prepares her own. By doing so she is able to “control outcomes better then, both in OBE terms and in real teaching / learning terms”. Once again she raises the dichotomy between ‘OBE teaching’ and “real teaching”. AH uses published worksheets only if she wishes to target specific skills at which particular worksheets are aimed. Again there is the notion of worksheets helping one to target specific skills or learning outcomes.

Other respondents observe that worksheets should not limit or inhibit learners, or be allowed to undermine the spontaneous pleasure of reading and discussion. For some, worksheets help to shape lesson structure, while for others they should not become the main focus. LJ suggests that worksheets provide the means for teachers to use multi-faceted material, sourced, for example, from the
Internet. This raises the point that a curriculum presents the minimum that teachers are expected to cover, so one could therefore argue that an OBE curriculum such as C2005 need not be limiting. On the other hand, while C2005 does not prescribe content or method, it does prescribe outcomes. It is up to the teacher to try to deliver these in as interesting and creative way as possible, but outcomes there must be.

Conclusions:

The issue of worksheets was included in the questionnaire because of their dual purpose in facilitating assessment as well as creative work. Both purposes are mentioned, but only one respondent refers specifically to the use of worksheets in relation to outcomes. Generally, respondents display ambivalent attitudes towards worksheets, as they can serve a purpose, but can be overdone. Because worksheets mean so many things to so many teachers, there is no conclusive evidence that they use them as tools for precise assessment of the outcomes as prescribed by C2005, although one might perhaps infer that this does happen at times. Therefore, as worksheets are not highlighted as essential tools for delivering OBE outcomes in the teaching of fiction, they do not play a direct role in either supporting or refuting the argument of this thesis.

On the other hand, many of the comments offered by respondents serve to confirm the value they attach to open-ended discussion, or to “real” teaching as opposed to “OBE teaching”. There is an overall sense in the above responses that worksheets should not be allowed to spoil the pleasure of spontaneous reading and response, which could provide an interesting lead-in to what respondents have to say about assessment and outcomes later in the questionnaire.
5.2.6 Assessment

Rationale:

In the light of the integral role that assessment plays in OBE, knowing where teachers stand in relation to assessment in literature teaching would enable one to form a more rounded picture of the impact that the OBE curriculum has on them. Their views are solicited regarding the amount of formative and summative assessment relevant to their practice, and whether they view assessment as integral to and supportive of their teaching in the literature classroom.

One part of the central problem identified in this investigation is that teachers could experience tension between encouraging a response-based approach to literature teaching and C2005 injunctions relating to outcomes and assessment. As indicated in chapter four, assessment in C2005 is designed to test for achievements of pre-determined outcomes that can be demonstrated in some tangible way. Furthermore, assessment structures and procedures have the potential to fragment learning into discrete displays of competence, particularly in regard to essentially cognitive tasks, and this is considered inappropriate to the nature of readers' aesthetic responses to texts. Responses to this sub-section should reveal whether assessment practices in C2005 are in any way at odds with what teachers consider appropriate for their own practice.

Findings:

There is an element of inconsistency in what BS says about assessment taking place “only at the end”, and that assessment is integral to the learning process. There is no suggestion of any tension between the ideal and the actual in her teaching situation. She estimates that two thirds of assessment is summative and the rest formative. Her colleague MJ says that assessment is chiefly summative and formal. She points out with her usual candour that practice modifies
theoretical principle, and for good reasons: learner “indifference” to assessment as something to learn “from” as opposed to “for”, makes the “post-test situation frustrating”.

By contrast, AP reports that in her teaching situation (the school incorporates grades 4 to 12), most assessment is formative and “contextual”. A summative test is done after a six-month period. As to whether assessment supports learning, her view is that it does “encourage focus”, but adds, “often this is after the value of the work of fiction has been left behind”. How this dismissive comment fits in with the notion of assessment being both formative and “contextual” is far from clear, but it does portray assessment in a somewhat negative light. AP’s colleague SM is less positive about assessment being supportive of or integral to learning, as “too often assessment is to fill a gap in the exam or to finish it off”. This element of scepticism is carried into her responses to the next section. NH adopts the stance that assessment practices “can be helpful – guide learners etc. but can be the focus of the process rather than just part of it, which is my ideal”. It is her opinion that continuous assessment does carry some weight, although there is more emphasis on summative assessment.

The responses so far reveal some ambiguity in attitudes towards assessment. In some, this may be an unconscious trend, while in others there appears to be a conscious ambivalence, or a qualified attitude. AH, who teaches at a school that incorporates both a primary and a secondary section, reveals that assessment practices are more helpful in grades 7 to 9, while worksheets play a more important role in the lower grades. In her school both formative and summative forms of assessment are practised, and she tends to lean towards continuous assessment. “Teaching fiction” she says, “has a greater formative role and is not really assessed through tests / exams”.

WW (who with her four colleagues, teaches at a primary school), gives an essentially non-committal answer concerning the support or lack of support
offered by assessment. If questions and tasks are formulated in an appropriate and effective manner, assessment can be integral to teaching. Normally, a heavier weighting is given to formative procedures. CVA and CT corroborate these observations. CT adds that assessment tasks introduce a measure of extrinsic motivation for the pupils. WF suggests that assessment is generally not supportive of learning processes. Because of time restraints, “most forms of assessment have to be used for a mark-driven report when it comes to a first language”.

ML and her three high-school colleagues M-AL, LE and YN, prepare their learners for a formal examination. ML finds assessment practices valuable in that learners have to use their judgement, must be able to debate on paper, and the like. She adds that tests and examinations do not have to be “dry and dismal”. LE states that assessment does not really integrate with the learning process – “it’s as though we’re expecting them to know the book by heart instead of enjoying the reading”. To the question of whether assessment is integral to learning, YN simply says, “Yes”.

Conclusions:

An overview of the above responses reveals that they are as qualified as they are varied, that they beg a few questions, and send out some mixed signals. It is possible that several respondents are uncertain as to exactly what kinds of things assessment should be doing, as there is some evidence of muddled thinking. Certainly, there is little consensus about the value or purpose of assessment practices, even among colleagues at the same school.

The questionnaire was not explicit enough about requesting responses to certain issues in OBE assessment, for example its potential to fragment reading responses, and how the affective dimension could be accommodated. Information about this would have been particularly relevant. Issues such as time
constraints are mentioned and although there is evidence of scepticism about the value of assessment to the learning process, no one offers any comments on the how of assessment. This was not explicitly, but respondents were asked to state whether assessment played a supportive role or not, and to elaborate. Response is disappointingly thin in this regard. Individual interviews with four respondents later on would help to clarify certain aspects of assessment not addressed here. Respondents have a further opportunity to comment on assessment – in the context of OBE – when considering the nature and role of outcomes in the next section.

5.2.7 OBE and Curriculum 2005: understanding outcomes, and their effect on planning, implementation and impact of lessons

Rationale for sub-section 7 of the questionnaire:

Teachers’ understanding of what outcomes are should have a bearing on how they think about the usefulness of outcomes in planning and implementing their lessons. It should also inform their reflections on the effectiveness and impact of completed learning activities. For the purposes of this research, it is important to find out whether teachers have a clear enough idea about the nature of outcomes to be able to reflect rationally and consistently about how outcomes influence their practice. Section 7 lies at the very heart of the questionnaire; it tests whether practising teachers do or do not experience any tensions between what they say they prefer to do in teaching fiction, and what they perceive to be their duty when working with an outcomes-based approach. Responses so far indicate that teachers have already given their endorsement to the notion that fiction in the classroom involves a variety of tangible and intangible activities and processes. Several of them give low priority to tangible demonstrations of learning outcomes; most give high priority to processes involving the imagination and notions of self-growth and understanding. While the majority are in favour of a balance between cognitive and affective responses in engagements with
fiction, hardly any of the respondents are equivocal or merely lukewarm about the importance of the imagination in reading fiction.

What the respondents say should be seen in relation to the three premises underpinning the argument of this thesis. In essence, they are that responses are highly individual matters, that they involve essentially inner mental activity, and are not short-term in their effects. This implies that pre-selected outcomes can be wide of the mark in terms of how individuals in fact respond to given texts, that the demonstrations of visible achievements in OBE are inappropriate to the nature of the “aesthetic” reading process, and that precise, short-term assessments cannot capture the cumulative happenings and effects of reading and response.

As shown in appendix 1, teachers’ views about outcomes are elicited under general heading no.7 of the questionnaire, “OBE and Curriculum 2005” and divided into sub-sections 7A to 7D (with possible further comments about assessment in 7E). The description and critical analysis of the teachers’ responses given below follow the abovementioned sub-sections. In the interests of maintaining a sharper focus on the issues central to this research, a rationale, findings and conclusions are provided for each of the different sub-sections.

**Item 7A: Understanding the term ‘outcome’**

**Rationale:**

As outcomes are the cornerstone of the whole OBE philosophy, a basic understanding of the concept is fundamental to meaningful reflection on C2005 and its impact on response-based literature teaching. Spady, C2005 and by the NCS broadly define outcomes as demonstrations of what learners can do as a result of what they have learned. OBE incorporates a ‘design-back’ approach to lesson planning. Values and attitudes must also be demonstrated, but outcomes
do not cover inner cognitive and affective processes. This has important implications for reader response, and respondents’ insight into the nature of outcomes will have a bearing on what they understand about these implications. Their responses could also indicate the extent to which their practice is genuinely modified by OBE.

Findings:

The fifteen ‘definitions’ of outcomes appear in full at the beginning of Appendix 4. A noticeable feature about what respondents understand by the term ‘outcomes’ is that no two responses are alike, and very few are even close to one another in how they are formulated. Several respondents mention skills as being the main target of an outcome, for example a “skill the learner must be able to do / perform”, and “what skill you wish the child to attain”. Five of the fifteen respondents describe an outcome as being a demonstration of an achievement, but not all of them refer to skill or competency. Sometimes skills are mentioned amongst other attributes such as knowledge, values and attitudes. Some descriptions place the emphasis on the completion of actions, as in “has successfully acquired”, “must have achieved at the end of…”, while others imply a looking ahead to a purpose that must be achieved, for example “should be able to demonstrate”, “must be able to do” and “must be reached or attained”.

Several refer to what the educator would “like”, “want” or “wish” the learner to achieve. One mentions “skills we want them to have picked up”, and another refers to “what the learner gains from the particular task”. These descriptions make no reference to the achievement of outcomes in relation to pre-determined criteria. Only two of the fifteen respondents do so. Some definitions are short and narrow in focus while others are more comprehensive, for example “a specific objective that each learner should achieve”, and “what you would like the learner to achieve / what the learner gains from the particular task; the learner will be able to acquire skills, knowledge, attitudes and values / insight”.

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Some respondents use words like “goal” and “objective” as synonyms for ‘outcome’. Two respondents imply that outcomes are associated with the mastery of certain knowledge or skills before learners can proceed further. One respondent describes an outcome as “the thing you have to tick on a sheet and have proof that the learner can do even though it is a concept you know the learner is capable of without formal methods of proving it”. The dismissive nature of this comment leaves one in no doubt that the respondent finds OBE largely a waste of time. Perhaps the formulation that most accurately captures the essence of an outcome as it is posited in C2005 is “a demonstrable performance of something pre-determined as a learning criterion”.

**Conclusions:**

Apart from the last-mentioned formulation (which could be termed a ‘definition’ because of its accuracy and succinctness), none of the above really succeeds in drawing together the relevant elements of an outcome. The latter should include the pre-determination of criteria that govern the demonstrable output resulting from pre-selected learning input. Several of the respondents talk loosely about what is wanted or is being aimed at, or what should be achieved, without linking it necessarily to a prior commitment to bringing it about. This could imply that these respondents may not feel much pressure to ensure that they do bring about what they are aiming at or wishing to achieve. It may also imply that these teachers do not necessarily incorporate a ‘design-back’ element into their lessons. It would not be too surprising if some teachers were to say that they ‘know’ what they have to do and hope to achieve, so just carry on and then pick out the relevant outcomes afterwards. This is a ‘survival’ strategy that could relieve a great deal of potential stress. As far as the impact of OBE on reader response is concerned, this might be seen as less significant than it might appear if the actual nature of outcomes is taken into account.
The fact that some of the teachers incorporate several concepts in their view of what an outcome is (for example “a long-term objective … an aim; a goal … skills we want them to have picked up / mastered”) must mean that they do not have a very clear or sharp focus on just what is expected of them. A ‘wide-angle lens’ on what they are to deliver by way of outcomes means that their ‘target’ is a very broad one and therefore not easy to miss. Some teachers refer elsewhere to the specific outcomes being very broad or vague, hence making it quite a simple matter to accomplish them across a wide range of activities. One may perhaps have to conclude that this perspective can lead teachers to feel less accountable for what they in fact do achieve in the literature classroom. If planned learning activities are not too ‘narrowed’ by particular outcomes, there would be little problem of the kind highlighted by premise 1 of this thesis, that the idiosyncratic nature of reader response makes it difficult to determine in advance what outcomes should result from engagement with a literary text. To ‘avoid’ – either intentionally or unintentionally – the real strictures of outcomes is really to gloss over part of the conceptual problem being investigated in this thesis.

The fact that only five of the respondents describe outcomes as tangible demonstrations of achievement could mean that most of them might not perceive any incompatibility between the private or inner nature of reader response and what outcomes in fact require learners to do: demonstrate competence in a tangible manner. The implications of premise two – that inaccessible mental processing cannot be gauged by means of tangible demonstrations of competence – could then be lost on them. The same would probably apply to premise three, that reader response needs time and space to evolve, and should not be fragmented into discrete units of ‘performance’ for the purposes of assessment. These factors could certainly influence how they see the demands of OBE affecting their classroom practice.
Item 7B: Planning lessons according to pre-selected outcomes

Rationale:

Does teaching towards outcomes help with the rationale behind, and planning of, lesson activities? Do teachers actually employ a ‘design-back’ approach to planning their lessons? This is a key question for teachers to answer, because it has much to do with whether OBE works for them or not. Sanguine, bland or superficial answers may well be exposed both here and in the light of answers to subsequent questions.

Findings:

There is less variety in the responses to this question than to the previous one. Most of the respondents seem fairly receptive to the idea that outcomes can help them to focus better on what they want to achieve, although most of them qualify their acceptance of this in some way. BS feels that teachers “naturally” teach towards specified outcomes, an idea that MJ supports in principle, adding that transparency about intended outcomes helps the learners to keep focused too. However, MJ adds that outcomes should not be allowed to become restrictive if the lesson goes “productively off track”. This does imply that precise outcomes planning can be inappropriate at times, especially in the context of teaching literature. MJ also raises an issue that bears directly on the problem identified in this thesis, namely that there is the danger of knowledge being atomised into measurable units of assessment. She comments on the sometimes “trite” and “bitty” nature of outcomes that “are not geared towards any overall, bigger picture”. It must be assumed that she is referring to the more detailed outcomes compiled for particular learning activities.

AH, on the other hand, feels that the specific outcomes are “vague”. Working within an outcomes-based system could be acceptable for her if she could set
her own outcomes, as the official ones are “not always defined” and are “difficult to implement”. WW agrees that vagueness is a problem with many of the SOs, so much so that they could be applied to “a wide range of activities”. She does, however add that it does help to know what “end product” one is aiming for, although the outcomes often change according to the “demands of the classroom”. Like MJ, she acknowledges that lessons do deviate from what is planned. CT agrees, observing that pre-specified outcomes should help the teacher to focus on her planning, “but unfortunately what is planned in theory often goes out the window when put into practise”.

Several respondents, then, accept the notion that outcomes planning can be useful for both teacher and pupils, but qualify their stance by referring to the unpredictable nature of classroom dynamics or other imponderables associated, presumably, with literature teaching. Other respondents who do not really qualify their acceptance of outcomes in principle include WF, who, like WW, refers to the “end product” that one focuses on, adding that because of pre-determined outcomes, “you already know how you will assess it”. The fact that WF is a specialist mathematics teacher (also teaching some English) may have a bearing on his terms of reference, but ML, a specialist English teacher at high school, observes, in similar vein, that outcomes help to “narrow the focus” and that “most of what you wish to do can be assessed”. Two other high school teachers observe that their lessons keep to a structure; one of them adding that one should begin “with an end in mind. Knowing where we want to end up before we get started is very important”. This observation flies in the face of any argument that the literature classroom should be a place where learners are encouraged to explore their responses, reflect on them and interact with others in an open-ended fashion. Another of the high school respondents even remarks that apart from helping teachers to focus on what they want to do, outcomes “promote creativity”, but she does not enlarge on this.
Three high school colleagues are extremely sceptical about the role that outcomes should be allowed to play in the planning of lessons. AP makes the point that during assessment, she tries not to miss outcomes that “the activity was not designed to reveal. Things still happen serendipitously. That shouldn’t stop”. SM is of the opinion that teaching towards outcomes does not help her with her planning. “It is just extra work for something we instinctively would have covered in any case”. NH feels that outcomes are very seldom useful for planning purposes. “They detract from creative processes and focus on paperwork” because one is too busy “focusing on other ‘stuff’ and not on the kids’ learning”. The reference to creative processes directly contradicts what another respondent observed about creativity being promoted by outcomes.

Conclusions:

Respondents can be divided roughly into three groups according to the way they viewed the usefulness of outcomes in lesson planning. Firstly there are those who offer relatively unqualified support for the idea; secondly there are those who are not opposed to outcomes in principle, but see how they could prove inadequate in practice, and lastly those who are opposed to outcomes because they are in conceptual opposition to how they, as teachers, like to go about the teaching of literature.

The latter group comprises the same respondents who were the most coherent in their understanding of outcomes as a concept. For them, the implications of having to ‘design back’ from a pre-determined outcome seemed clear in the light of their objections to outcomes interfering with the “serendipitous”, “real” or “instinctive” nature of teaching literature. Their stance lends the most convincing support to the argument of this thesis, particularly in terms of the first two premises concerning the idiosyncratic and private nature of engagements with imaginative texts.
Respondents who are more cautious in their acceptance of outcomes also lend a degree of credibility to the argument of the thesis. Their references to lessons going “productively off track”, for example, show that such deviations can be ‘profitable’ and creative, and as long as this is not a rare exception, the very track from which lessons can deviate must be called into question. This, however, will be more thoroughly tested in the next sub-section, where respondents report on the usefulness or otherwise of outcomes planning during lesson activities. They are probably less likely to adopt a theoretical stance about the notion of outcomes ‘in principle’ than would be the case with planning. Moreover, if one takes into account the fact that most of the respondents are teachers of considerable experience, planning is likely to be more of a theoretical issue anyway, as teachers would tend to spend less time on planning as they gather experience. The latter observation is, however, an untested assumption.

**Item 7C: The role of outcomes during learning activities**

**Rationale:**

If the answer to the previous question (whether outcomes are useful for planning lessons) is in the affirmative, it might be reasonable to expect a positive answer to whether outcomes play a helpful role during teaching and learning activities as well. If this is not the case, then there is some discontinuity between planning and implementation, or respondents are seeing outcomes in a different light when it comes to lesson activities in action.

**Findings:**

Only one of the respondents (WF) shifts his position when considering the usefulness of outcomes during lesson activities. From having given unqualified support to the principle of outcomes in lesson planning, WF states that they do not assist him much, as they are “admin-driven and not very user-friendly”. All of
the other respondents make observations that are consistent with their earlier remarks in relation to planning. Those who accepted outcomes in principle, but thought that adjustments might have to be made in practice, confirm that in theory certain choices might be fitting, yet they sometimes do not work out during the lesson activities themselves. Respondents who gave unqualified support to outcomes for planning purposes (with the exception of WF) follow the same line here. The respondent who stated that SOs “promote creativity” follows through with the belief that outcomes ‘give direction / dictate activities”. She apparently sees no difficulty with this, and nor does ML, who nevertheless grants that one “has to be flexible”. Those who rejected outcomes in principle maintain the same stance with regard to their actual experience in the classroom.

Conclusions:

A possible discrepancy between responses concerning what is accepted in principle and what transpires in practice does not materialise. The reason is probably that the respondents who gave theoretical or qualified support to outcomes did express their reservations earlier. In other words, planning lessons according to pre-selected outcomes can assist with providing a sharper focus, but lessons might sometimes go off in a different direction, in which case, some adjustment would have to be made, either to the outcome or to the direction the lesson was taking. The fact that these reservations are vindicated by actual experience gives no reason for respondents to think differently about what they stated earlier.

Item 7D: Whether SOs or lesson outcomes fail to capture what is wanted

Rationale:

Item 7D invites respondents to describe ‘in a nutshell’ their experience of OBE in the context of teaching fiction. Does it “fail to capture” what they really wish to do
and achieve? This is the first question that is not neutral, and contains the possibility of ‘leading’ respondents in a particular direction. By the same token, if respondents had expressed any negative sentiments about OBE and outcomes prior to 7D, the latter would provide an opportunity to consolidate what they had said up till this point. Conversely, if essentially positive sentiments had been the order of the day leading up to 7D, it seems unlikely that these would change in any significant manner through the influence of a leading question. Teachers do not have to be analytical in their responses, but are free to comment on how they feel about possible constraints in the classroom.

Findings:

Eleven of the fifteen respondents report that pre-selected outcomes do fail to capture what they would like to see happening in the classroom. Perhaps this is not too surprising after all, because the question is framed in a direct manner, as if to say, “whatever you may think of the advantages and disadvantages of outcomes, how do they really work for you?” Even BS, who has been quite bland in her responses thus far, comments that those who were responsible for drawing up the requirements “have not been in the classroom for years”, and are clearly out of touch with “what actually happens”. She feels that she and her colleagues are doing some kind of hybrid version of OBE that is tempered by the “old” methods. Her colleague MJ voices similar sentiments about curriculum planners being out of touch with reality. As for a possible solution (a ryder to question 7D), she rejoins, “wish some one would tell me!” MJ also refers to the outcomes as being “intimidating” and “trite”, and clearly feels considerable tension about having to use them.

In view of their sharply critical stance from the outset, the responses of AP, SM and NH are not surprising. AP’s answer is blunt. “Absolutely: I hate the jargon words and I find they keep one far too conscious and less creative”. She also feels that she is now a “worse classroom teacher”, as the need to become more
“left-brained”, a product of better focus and channeling, means she is less able to respond spontaneously. SM states categorically that “the outcomes will not capture what happens”, citing the sheer amount of paperwork involved as a major problem. For her, “the system can’t work – too time consuming, too much admin, too many different systems”. NH, who probably comes the closest to putting her finger on the conceptual issue, is emphatic in her agreement that outcomes do not capture what should or could be happening in the classroom – “but I keep saying this”, she adds. AH feels that outcomes could work if teachers could compile their own, ones that are relevant to their situation.

WW is very sceptical about the value of the outcomes as they appear in the curriculum; they will not work if one adheres strictly to them. She feels it is more important to adapt “according to the needs of your class than to remain rigid for the sake of marking off that a specific outcome has been achieved”. Because learners sometimes “latch onto a different aspect” one has to adapt, says CVA, who feels that outcomes do not always provide what one wants. For CT, outcomes are problematical in practice, if not in principle, the considerable paperwork involved in the recording of outcomes being the main cause. Only YN and LJ deny that outcomes do not come up to the mark; for YN they provide “excellent direction”, while LJ sees them as “a good way of achieving balance and structure in a subject that could be totally unstructured and spontaneous, or even irrelevant”.

Conclusions:

Significant objections to specific outcomes and other structures of assessment are raised by most of the respondents. The objections concern the use of “jargon”, the perception of the outcomes as “intimidating” or “trite”, that they are “vague”, or out of touch with reality, and generally unsuited to the teachers’ real purposes in real classrooms. This amounts to a considerable indictment of the
outcomes-based system as used in C2005. There is less of a sense that logistics play a major or determining role in these responses than previously. Comments that outcomes draw teachers away from facilitating creative engagements, away from the “real stuff”, and that when adjustments are necessary, one should always ‘go with the class’, should be taken seriously. Such comments are a way of relating the conceptual issues to real pedagogical contexts. These highlight the tension between pre-selection versus open choice, and of tangible performance versus inner growth through personal engagements with literature.

These perceptions about OBE in the classroom lend significant support to the main argument of this thesis. It would be unrealistic to expect teachers to adopt stances of a purely conceptual nature, stances that did not take the real and pressing nature of the curricular injunctions into account. Teachers’ perceptions about the nature of OBE are unlikely, in a practical context, to be separated from their experience of it in the many ways it impacts on them. Hence, although many respondents refer to the nature of the outcomes as being inadequate, they also place this into perspective by indicating, for example, how the administrative burden exacerbates a system already perceived to be inadequate. In this sense, then, the teachers’ responses not only support, but also add strength to the hypothesis of this thesis.

**Item 7E: additional comments about assessment**

**Rationale:**

This item allows teachers a final comment about assessment in the light of what they have thought and said about their experience with outcomes. Many of the comments about the administrative burdens associated with outcomes have made implicit links with expectations regarding assessment.
Findings:

Several respondents offer no further comments about assessment; the high school group of four consider themselves to be “too new at the game”, although the learners “are used to it”, and “enjoy seeing their specific outcomes – they claim it gives them more information that is specific”. Most of the additional comments, however, are about the vagueness of assessment procedures, which makes them “very confusing”. AH points out that parents still want traditional assessment reports containing marks or percentages, so teachers spend their time “translating” OBE assessment to a ‘mark’. “This is an absolute waste of time”. CT agrees, arguing that attempts at a “marriage” of the old and the new systems “does not work”. CT also points out the time constraints associated with having to arrive at outcomes-based assessments for thirty or more individual pupils, “and so you opt for a general assessment”. The evident frustration caused by this situation tends, however, to ‘mask’ the question of whether ‘marks’ should be the means of assessing reader response in the first place. The lack of clear guidelines from the Department of Education exacerbates what is, for WW, the “area of greatest concern within OBE” namely assessment.

Conclusions:

Assessment procedures are integral to the concept of OBE, and so they have a direct impact upon how the system works out in practice. For the teachers who have to implement OBE, assessment accounts for a substantial amount of the time they must invest in the whole process. However, it is not merely fact that assessment is so time consuming; it is also the uncertainty surrounding exactly how teachers are expected to implement it, that causes frustration and tension. When this is added to the experience that C2005 does not accommodate what many teachers like to encourage and facilitate in the literature classroom, it can only heighten feelings of alienation.
5.2.8 Teacher / learner input in teaching and learning activities

Rationale:

It is in this section that respondents have the opportunity to say whether, in the context of aesthetic responses, learner centred ideas really work for them in practice. No one indicated in the teaching and learning priorities section (2) that they did not believe in active learner participation or group work. Many of the items imply an active role for the reader; others such as 2L and 2Q refer explicitly to it.

Findings:

BS makes the point that, when working in groups, some learners “piggy-back” the efforts of others, and in so doing, develop very few skills. This scenario has obvious implications for teachers having extra demands made on them and on their class management, which they may not welcome, particularly in view of ever-present time constraints. Colleague MJ opts for playing the dominant role as the teacher, given the need to maintain good discipline and order, although she allows and encourages pupil participation. An irony not specifically mentioned by MJ is that being required to ‘deliver’ outcomes places teachers under certain time (and other) pressures; meanwhile, learner participation, discussion, interaction and other open activities are being championed by Curriculum 2005. One recalls the observation (Kraak, 1999) that Curriculum 2005 is progressive in discourse, yet conservative in assessment methodology.

AP reports that sometimes the learners “drive and conduct the lesson. Sometimes I do”. For SM, time is frequently a problem when she wishes learners to make inputs or work in groups. She refers to having to “bulldoze” her way through lessons sometimes in order to create time in which to do other more creative things. She speaks of having to “muddle along trying your best”, a
remark that constitutes a fitting finale to what she has been pointing out all along.
It might be easy to regard SM as somewhat jaundiced in her views with regard to
OBE, yet her comments do represent a more explicit version of what many of the
others are saying between, if not always on, the lines.

NH sometimes arrives at the situation where the teacher, in an “ideal world”,
merely “guides” while the learners make “loads of input”. Sometimes she
achieves this, sometimes not. Overall, NH’s response is among those most
critical of outcomes in the context of literary activities in the classroom.
Nevertheless her stance does embody some balance between creative and
imaginative activities on the one hand, and tasks requiring intellectual processing
and reading skills, on the other. Although NH does not rate very highly the activity
of readers analysing their own responses, her balance between cognitive and
affective pursuits are in line with the views of Meek (1990:10) on “combining
understanding and affect” and Benton (1992: 33) whose four elements of
response in reading project a balance in reading activities when “interacting with
the fictional world”.

AH allows her learners plenty of scope to make input. “They are taught that they
must be able to qualify statements”. Rosenblatt (in Karolides, 1999:164) refers to
the need for readers to exercise self-criticism, to “return to the text” in order to
prevent response from being overly subjective. AH is always “open to hear what
they think”, and corrects them if they are “totally off the mark”. When marking
literature scripts she does not follow a memorandum strictly, hence making
allowance for independent thinking. “In working with fiction it has always been
more important to gain their views than to give mine. I would give them my view
but they were free to disagree. A qualification or explanation always needs to
follow a point”. Group work and worksheets help to overcome the problem of
having large numbers in a class, when all learners cannot give input.
Nevertheless, AH gives positive endorsement to open-ended processes in her
encouragement of readers responding to fiction.
WW testifies to her learners having opportunities to make “a great deal of input”, although there are still areas of the curriculum that oblige the teacher to play a dominant role. An ongoing ‘constraint’ is the need to maintain strict control so that discipline and order can prevail during group work – the latter being something that takes place frequently. Her primary school colleague CVA finds that she often tends to lead the discussions, but encourages all the learners to express their opinions and reassures them that they are “welcome to have different views to their peers as long as they can say why they feel that way”. A similar balance is struck in the approach followed by LJ, who points out that a teacher is, “after all, an educator, not just a facilitator”. She adds that a teacher can only gauge how effective her teaching is when learners are “actively involved in the learning process”.

LJ gives strongly endorses group work, saying one must be prepared for more ‘buzz’, (not noise) and movement. She maintains that the benefits “far outweigh the odd discipline problem”, that the learners gain much from “experiencing group roles and dynamics” and that they learn a great deal from one another. CT concurs, indicating that learners have plenty of scope to make their own inputs. WF implies that “sound educational principles” should not be overlooked in the shift to child-oriented learning strategies. Logistical issues such as creating enough classroom space for group work, obliges teachers to be more creative, he points out. He and his four colleagues, it would be fair to say, give sound overall endorsement to active participation on the part of the grades 4 to 7 children.

ML has always tried to give her grades 8 and 9 pupils some space, but admits that she is “still very dominant”, particularly as her pupils generally have “so little background” to bring to the classroom. She tries to rectify this by means of projects covering a wide range of topics. MAL echoes ML’s view (“teacher input still predominates”), as does YN (“It is quite balanced… I would still say that I am
dominant though”). LE says it depends on what she is doing, “but basically the learners are able to give input”.

Conclusions:

What teachers say here is essentially in keeping with their priorities with regard to teaching fiction as indicated in the five-point scale. A willingness to encourage open-ended discussion, as well as the principle that there are no “right” or “wrong” answers in certain areas of response, is tempered by the practical need to maintain the conditions necessary for orderly classroom interaction to take place. There is relatively little evidence of a ‘classroom management approach’ being dominant, or of a ‘default’ view of learners’ reading competence dictating teacher dominance in the literature classroom. On the whole, respondents testify to a sound balance between teacher and learner input.

Although several respondents partly misinterpreted the question, thinking that the issue was that of class size (teacher-pupil ratio), there is enough evidence here to suggest that the teachers who completed the questionnaire do create classroom conditions that are amenable to reader response. This substantiates their observations regarding the role that outcomes play in their overall approach to promoting imaginative engagements with fiction.

5.3 Concluding comments

Most if not all respondents endorse a balanced approach in terms of encouraging readers’ responses to fiction. They attach priority to both cognitive and affective dimensions of response. Very few respondents give much credence to tangible demonstrations of learning outcomes, but not all of them perceive, in principle, substantial incompatibility between teaching towards pre-selected learning outcomes and the processes involved in responding to fiction. Four respondents from one school (where OBE is done in grades 8 and 9), namely ML, MAL, LE
and YN, indeed reveal a positive outlook towards planning and teaching towards outcomes. They express no misgivings or frustrations for either conceptual or practical reasons. This could partly be due to their adopting a 'wait-and-see' approach to something they experience as being quite 'new' to them. This limits the helpfulness of their responses, to some extent, in terms of supporting or refuting the main argument of this thesis.

By contrast, MJ, who also teaches in a high school, finds the pressure of outcomes a great source of stress, while most other respondents find that their obligations towards outcomes cause them varying degrees of frustration, partly because the outcomes are vague, and partly because they – the outcomes – are ‘out of touch’ with the realities of the classroom. Towards the opposite end of the spectrum to that of ML and her colleagues, AP laments having become a lesser teacher in favour of becoming more “left-brained” to cope with OBE requirements; SM, one might almost say, is quite cynical about the OBE “paper-chase”, while NH is particularly concerned about the harm that OBE can inflict on creativity in the literature classroom.

All of the respondents endeavour to give honest personal comment; some acknowledge their lack of experience with OBE; others are quite outspoken in terms of their misgivings or frustrations. Some respondents reveal a clearer focus about certain concepts such as outcomes, while there are even instances where respondents make statements which appear to contradict earlier ones. Most of the respondents, nevertheless, reveal a willingness to make whatever adjustments are needed in order to integrate OBE principles and practice into their teaching of fiction. In most cases this has not been without quite substantial difficulty.

As stated earlier, I avoided ‘priming’ the respondents in any way as to what kinds of responses might have been particularly interesting in terms of the line of argument followed in my research. The preamble to the questionnaire and the
questions themselves were, in the main, quite neutral. The result is that teachers have apparently felt free to comment in the ways they felt to be most appropriate for themselves and their situation as they experience it.

This means that respondents give no evidence of trying to produce ‘ideal’ answers. Where some of them feel that what they propose in principle has more substance in theory than in practice, they say so. While the various sub-sections in the questionnaire have not ‘led’ respondents in a particular direction, they have succeeded in keeping the essential issues in focus, namely teachers’ subjective preferences in literature teaching, their understanding of outcomes and the various points at which they impact on their teaching, and assessment. Teachers’ responses offer both width and depth in terms of the curricular injunctions with which they must cope in the context of OBE practice.

While there are signs that some of the respondents are not engaging fully with the conceptual issues, there is abundant evidence that most of them are clear about what it is they are dealing with. Most of them give voice to considerable frustration with regard to facilitating reading responses in the context of C2005. These frustrations are not merely about logistical matters. A few of the teachers give the impression that if it were not for the burden of recording the assessment procedures, OBE would work well for them. There are others who find OBE dialectically opposed to what they believe should be happening in the literature classroom. All points of view reflect the reality that conceptual misgivings and practical considerations are intimately related to each other. They are mutually enriching in terms of the added insights and perspectives that each provides. Ultimately, however, at least two thirds of the respondents express quite fundamental concerns about outcomes not capturing what they would like to see happening in the classroom. Consequently, the overall responses to the questionnaire play a significant role in supporting the main tenets of this investigation.
I wished to follow up the questionnaire with group and individual interviews with teachers who had responded to it. This would create the opportunity for respondents to elaborate further on points previously made. However, I also wished to leave open the possibility of interacting with teachers who had not seen the questionnaire. Regarding the group interviews, interaction between respondents might also give rise to additional insights and perspectives that their private responses might not have extended to. As a first step I interviewed the group of five teachers from a primary school (WW, CVA, LJ, CT and WF, together with the school principal) and focused on several key responses they had made in the questionnaire. This is reported on in chapter six.
CHAPTER SIX: THEORY AND PRACTICE – GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS AND TEACHER TRAINERS

6.1 Opening up the issues

Semi-structured interviews are included in my research methodology in order to encourage respondents to think more freely about certain aspects of reader response in relation to their teaching and assessment practices in an OBE environment. Adequate room is allowed, within limits, for possible directions in which respondents might take the points under discussion. Key aspects of engagement with literary texts that respondents are asked to consider are based on a set of principles, listed below, that inform the argument of this thesis. They provide the conceptual underpinnings for both the contents of the questionnaire (as reported in the previous chapter), and the discussion in the group and individual interviews. They are as follows:

6.1.1 Response – with particular reference to imaginative literature – is the core reading activity, without which, personal meaning-making reading cannot take place.

6.1.2 Some aspects of reading or literary study such as knowledge and use of critical terminology, literary or biographical history, plot summary and other structural features of stories may be assessed in effective, tangible ways, but on their own do not have much to say about how readers experience fiction.

6.1.3 The above aspects of literary study relate quite easily to the notion of competency and hence lend themselves to assessment procedures that test for individual competencies in reader knowledge or skill.
6.1.4 Readers’ responses relate to readers as whole people with intellect and emotions, and not to fragmentable items of skill or knowledge that can be demonstrated or performed.

6.1.5 Responses are essentially inner processes containing cognitive and affective dimensions (enabling readers to perceive relationships, make judgements, empathise, predict, express emotion and a sense of identity).

6.1.6 Responses are formative and developmental and evolve over a period of time, as demonstrated in cognitive / schemata theory.

6.1.7 Literature and literature study are not distinct activities in response-based reading programmes.

6.1.8 The reader plays a creative role as co-creator of textual meaning.

6.1.9 Readers are unique individuals whose personal schemata / perspectives are influenced by prior and ongoing experience.

6.1.10 It is inappropriate to try and predict how readers in general will respond to particular texts, or to specify reading outcomes in advance of particular activities that are subject to assessment.

Two group interviews are discussed in this chapter. The first is with a small group of teachers following their completion of the questionnaire discussed in the previous chapter. The second is with four in-service teacher trainers, working for the Western Region of the Department of Education of the Eastern Cape.
6.2 Follow-up group interview with teachers

6.2.1 Focusing on selected prior responses

I ruled out the possibility – mainly for logistical reasons – of staging follow-up interviews with all fifteen teachers who had completed the questionnaire. However, I judged that LJ, WF, CVA, WW and CT (colleagues at the same school) might generate some useful feedback, having provided a diversity of insights in responding to the questionnaire. An additional factor in my choice of interviewees was that their school principal, because of his personal interest in the impact of C2005 on education, had been directly involved in facilitating the participation of these five members of staff. He was thoroughly conversant with a whole range of OBE issues from both a conceptual and logistical point of view. He also participated in the interview.

Although the ten principles set out above lie at the heart of what is being investigated in this thesis, some narrowing down was done in the interests of obtaining a sharper focus on the conceptual problems identified in this thesis. This was based on a selection of their responses to the questionnaire. The latter, comprising fourteen responses (see Appendix 4), focused mainly on the concept and role of outcomes, and on assessment, two aspects that had elicited relatively strong reaction from the respondents. The group interview offered the prospect of the teachers elaborating on some of their written responses.

Each statement is written out in full below, followed by comments about how the teachers responded.

1. *SOs (specific outcomes) are so broad that you can fit them in anywhere (CT – 7D) / Many of the outcomes are so vague they can be applied to a wide range of activities (WW – 7B).*
There was general agreement about this. Rather than constituting a problem, it was generally felt that this allowed sufficient room for teachers to fit in what they planned to do. Practically any outcome for a particular lesson or sequence of lessons could fit in with practically any SO. The latter were therefore not at all restrictive. On the other hand, there was no discussion about whether comments on the focusing role of the SOs contradicted statements that they were broad or vague. In as much as the outcomes lack specificity, the problem identified in premise one of this thesis (elaborated on in principles 6.1.9 and 6.1.10 above), i.e. that the idiosyncratic nature of individual response makes it difficult to predict outcomes with any accuracy, is thereby neutralised to some extent. What this means, however, is that OBE can presumably be applied in the context of literature teaching in such a way that it means very little. Hence the ‘problem’ is avoided.

2 But when working with 30 individuals it falls short, mainly because you do not have time to accurately assess each one (CT – 7D).

CT, who made the above comment in relation to 7D, feels that there is insufficient time to assess each learner. Even though the SOs “are so broad that you can fit them in anywhere”, the whole exercise, presumably, “falls short” because she opts for a “general assessment”. L J encountered no difficulties with assessing each individual, although her situation is different: she does not have to teach all of the learning areas. She teaches pre-primary, but her teaching of older pupils is confined to support for English Second Language learners. There was general agreement, however, that with having to teach the other learning areas as well, teachers are too pressured to do detailed individual assessment reports. This matter is taken up again in point 10 of this list.
3  We are encouraged to experiment in Grade 5. We do not actually teach fiction (CT- 4).

There was little, if any, discussion of this point. No teacher felt constrained in any way about what to teach (they were “encouraged to experiment”). This could probably be linked to the earlier comment about SOs being so broad anyway. ‘Not teaching fiction’ is taken up in the next point.

4  With the pressure of teaching all learning areas, literature is often pushed aside to make way for ‘more important’ work (WW– 4).

Four of the five felt that work from the other learning areas risked being neglected because there were eight learning areas and also because of class numbers. In order to pick up speed and save time, reading was often integrated into other learning areas, with the result that reading or literature per se did not occur on a regular basis. Because reading is integral to all learning areas, it was generally felt that important outcomes for reading were being achieved anyway while being done in the other learning areas.

Giving little attention to literature as a separate activity would, in a sense, not have been out of line with either version of the OBE curriculum. Considering the extremely limited presence of imaginative and affective processes in reading among the assessment criteria and assessment standards, integrating reading into the activities of other learning areas would meet the bulk of the requirements for reading. Point 6.1.2 in the previous section refers to the more ‘learnable’ and ‘assessable’ aspects of literature such as knowledge acquisition, the terminology associated with story grammar, and so on, but which do not reflect much about how readers experience fiction.
Teachers among this group do not target SOs for one particular lesson period and tick them off when done. It all depends on circumstances. Being class teachers (of all the learning areas, as opposed to being subject ‘specialists’) means that they can make their own choices about when and how much to teach of what, and how much emphasis to place where. This position gives them an overview of general progress and SOs achieved. They can adjust the pace and emphasis accordingly. It can hence be understood that teachers in this situation do not feel undue pressure to ‘produce’ pre-specified outcomes. Teachers who testified to feelings of pressure – even stress – at having to teach towards specified outcomes were operating in grades 8 and 9 in high schools. Grade 9 is the first stage at which formal assessment of outcomes in the General Education and Training band takes place.

5 It does help to know what ‘end product’ you are aiming for, although with diverse classes, these outcomes often change according to the demands of the classroom (WW – 7B).

Not much discussion occurred around this point. It follows after what WW wrote on the response sheet about the SOs being so vague that they can be applied to a wide range of activities. They do not help her to “focus any more specifically than before”, but “it does help to know what “end product” you are aiming for…” One may deduce that WW is perhaps being ‘polite’ with regard to the outcomes, but that they do not really make a difference in terms of focusing the mind. There are too many variables – hence the outcomes “often change according to the demands of the classroom”. Certainly in her case, outcomes are not the most important consideration in determining practice.

6 It is more important to adapt according to the needs of your class than to remain rigid for the sake of marking off that a specific outcome has been achieved (WW – 7D).
This opinion is in line with what was said by WW in the preceding point.

7 *The lack of directives from the education department allowed me to explore my own agenda and to be more creative (W F – 4).*

The school has not received any assessment guidelines. Perhaps they are only applicable to Grade 9; this school goes as far as Grade 7.

8 *Assessment practices are not really supportive of the teaching and learning process; because of time restraints, most assessment has to be used for a mark-driven report (W F – 6B).*

LJ would not have agreed with this. See point 11. The “mark-driven report” was not discussed.

9 *Unfortunately what is planned in theory often goes out the window when put into practice, because there are so many problems encountered along the way…we land up at another end point (CT – 7B).*

This comment is in response to a question about having better focus when teaching towards specified outcomes. Not arriving at pre-specified outcomes is “problematic”, yet no one felt they were actually pressurised by the SOs – they had already testified to their very open nature. WW commented that you have to look at where you end up, given variables of circumstance, and then ‘tick off’ what you have accomplished. Sometimes you end up ticking off the same outcomes a number of times. This indicates that specifying outcomes in advance does not necessarily mean that they will be achieved, because of the need to be flexible.
One member of the group commented that some reading books offer more potential for reaching certain outcomes than others. This would have some influence on being able to achieve in practice what one had thought to achieve beforehand. In Grade 7 there is a heavier emphasis on reading skills such as skimming and scanning than on reading for enjoyment – the latter attracting more attention in the earlier grades.

10 With my having to teach every subject, time does not allow the recording of each individual’s outcomes (paraphrase of CT – 7B).

CT makes the same point here as in 7D, and this was dealt with earlier. What she said was typical of the class teacher’s situation.

11 Teaching towards specified outcomes: learners know where they are going and whether or not they have arrived...more dynamic...learners seem to be more motivated...responsible...actively involved...helps tremendously with differentiation, helping all to achieve some success (LJ – 7B).

This response was not discussed at any one particular point, but the overwhelmingly positive feedback from LJ was touched on several times. Her situation was somewhat different from that of the others, as she is a pre-primary teacher, and her language teaching is confined to ‘after hours’ work at L2 level. Clearly talented, dedicated and experienced, LJ possesses the skill of getting the best out of every situation. No aspect of C2005 presented her with any negative aspects or problems. The others good-humouredly accepted this and were probably encouraged by her attitude, yet they were the class teachers who had ultimately to ‘balance the books’ over eight learning areas.
12 Pupils enjoy discussing a book, but don’t enjoy writing too much about it. A short worksheet is fine…(CVA – 5A)

This point was not discussed.

13 SOs fail to capture what you want to do…Yes, you are working with different minds…sometimes they latch onto a different aspect and then you have to adapt. (Not a problem.) (CVA – 7D)

This sentiment is in agreement with what was said about the SOs not putting anyone under pressure, and teachers anyhow doing what they judge best and adapting the SO accordingly – or ‘ticking off’ what there was to be ‘ticked off’ at the end. There was not much discussion of how the “different minds” presented a challenge to the notion of specifying clear outcomes for reading, but this is connected to point no. 14.

14 You often tend to lead the discussions, but encourage all learners to express their opinions, and reassure them that they are welcome to have different views to their peers as long as they can say why they feel that way (CVA – 8A)

CVA was the only person to make this point explicitly on the response sheet, although others agreed that learners were encouraged to share their “reflections with the teacher and other pupils”. WF made the point (during this discussion) that if he or she was not careful, a teacher could “border on indoctrination”, so influential is his or her position in the classroom, hence the need to encourage the expression of own opinion.

It was interesting to hear that some primary school pupils need to be reassured that their opinions are worth being heard. This is a problem
more commonly associated with high school literature, where the critics are commonly deferred to for ‘authoritative’ opinions about literature.

Concluding remarks:

There was no in-depth discussion or analysis of reader response per se, nor of the conceptual compatibility or incompatibility between it and pre-determined outcomes and tangible ways of assessing them. What emerges more from the group situation is a consensus that teachers who handle all or most of the learning areas experience time constraints as far as covering all the work is concerned. A point that is emphasised is that reading takes many different forms for many different purposes, and reading for personal enrichment and growth is merely one of them. Reading is often integrated into other learning areas that risk having insufficient time spent on them, which means that a substantial amount of attention is given to what Rosenblatt (1978:24) calls “efferent” reading purposes, i.e. reading of an ‘instrumental’ kind.

Other comments during the interview confirm some of the responses to the questionnaire, particularly on the subject of outcomes not necessarily being appropriate to their purposes, and how time-consuming the recording of outcomes is with fairly large classes. The teachers gave the impression that they adopt a largely pragmatic stance towards applying outcomes in the literature classroom. Given the vagueness of many outcomes and the lack of clarity about assessment procedures and standards, the teachers do what suits them best, and then afterwards make the effort to see how the official outcomes match what they have done. However in doing this, no two teachers do quite the same thing; each one decides which part of the curriculum structure, i.e. specific outcomes, assessment criteria, performance indicators and the like, to bring into the process of teaching and assessment.
Finally, nothing that was said or left unsaid during the interview nullified what this group of respondents had stated in their responses to the questionnaire. No members of this group admitted to experiencing any real stress or tension as a result of having to work in an outcomes-based manner; four of the five were adopting an attitude of tolerance towards OBE and devising strategies for coping with it. Only one was positive about OBE in practically all aspects of its application. It was useful hearing what the teachers had to say in one another’s company, and interesting to note that they acted individually in coping with OBE although they had to put up with the same challenges and inconveniences. In all, the main argument of this thesis is supported by how most of the teachers experience OBE in terms of reading activities, if not in their conceptual analysis of possibly contradictory elements in the process.

The school principal was present throughout the hour and a half discussion, and such was his relationship with the staff, and his thorough grounding, interest and support concerning the topic of my research, that I did not consider his presence to be at all inhibiting to the other teachers. The principal played the ‘devil’s advocate’ when claiming that, when it comes to assessment, there can be only right or wrong answers, otherwise there would be confusion. The others vehemently contested this. I had raised the issue when moving on to a discussion of “Statements on assessment in literature study” gleaned from Probst (1998). The teachers were requested to complete written responses to this document, the emphasis of which is on how the practice of teaching literature is influenced by the need to assess it. This list of statements is contained in Appendix 5. The teachers’ responses to this are presented in the next section.

6.2.2 Teachers’ responses to statements on assessment (Probst)

Four of the teachers in the group interview responded to the instrument, and their responses to each statement are considered in this section. Because only one of the four returned forms contained the respondent’s name (LJ), it cannot be seen
whether there is a positive correlation between the way every individual responded here, and the way he or she responded to the earlier questionnaire and in the group interview. Nevertheless, one may judge whether there is an overall consistency with regard to the stances taken on key issues. This is possible because the nine statements about assessment relate closely to the key issues being examined in this thesis.

The first statement on assessment is: *Literature, because it's a meeting of reader and text, is a difficult subject to test.* It relates to all three premises of this investigation, but perhaps most closely to the second, which refers to response as an essentially inner, mental activity that, because it is not readily observable, is not easily testable. The terms “meeting between reader and text” bring to mind Rosenblatt’s concept of a transaction between reader and text, one which underlines the highly individual nature of reading, and which is the core of premise number one in this thesis. Because reading is idiosyncratic, accurate outcomes are difficult to predict, and hence provide a poor base for assessment.

One respondent agreed, two disagreed and the fourth strongly disagreed with the statement. One who disagreed felt that assessment “gets easier with practice” and spoke of “substantiated critical thought”, which still does not really explain *how* the difficulty of assessing literature is to be addressed. LJ, who strongly disagreed with the first statement, claimed that if educator and learner “are clear about criteria to be assessed”, and if they feel “confident about this, it becomes an exciting meeting of minds, worlds, cultures…” This echoes other comments of a positive kind made by LJ (notably discussion point number 11 in the group interview), and is very similar to an observation made by respondent CW during an individual interview, to be discussed in the forthcoming chapter. CW speaks of her pupils even *enjoying* being given outcomes for lessons, and testing their progress in terms of such.
The second statement on assessment in literature is this: *If we could establish the one right reading of a work …then assessing the learning of literature would be easy.* This contradicts premise one of the thesis, which concerns the idiosyncratic nature of reading, brought about, inter alia, by the differences in experience and background between individual readers. Moreover, the second premise of this thesis refers to the inner, mental processing that occurs during response to texts, when individual schemata come into play. It is hence difficult to reconcile this premise with the notion that there could be one right reading of a work, or an ideal reading of a work that followers of New Critical thought might envisage.

Three of the four respondents agreed with the above statement. One of these, however, incorporated the proviso that “there is no one absolute, right interpretation” and added that during assessment, questions “should evaluate the learner’s perception and literary appreciation rather than the ‘right’ perspective”. The latter comments would appear to offer support for disagreement with the statement, rather than agreement. A second respondent who agreed added “But the joy and experience would be lost”. This implies that although a “right” reading may be possible and may therefore be easy to assess, a vital element of reading would be sacrificed in the process. That this respondent does not reject outright the notion of a correct reading may indicate an uncertainty about what the boundaries of assessment in reading really are. There is a consequent lack of focus in this kind of response compared to what was offered in the group interview.

The third statement, that *there are, of course, aspects that can accurately be measured*, drew agreement from all four, with one respondent linking it to “strongly content-based questions”, and another to the condition that the “criteria are clear”. These responses are in line with their earlier statements that there is not necessarily a great focus on the teaching of fiction per se in the Intermediate Phase – a point that will be discussed in relation to the individual interview with
CW also. One of the principles arising out of reader response criticism – namely 6.1.2 in the opening section of this chapter – refers to some aspects of reading or literary study as being more knowledge-based and easier to assess. The real point, however, is that such aspects do not tell one much about what really goes on in the mind of a reader during reading. 6.1.3 refers to this in terms of competency being tested in areas of knowledge and skill, rather than less tangible interactions with imaginative texts.

The problem is that essential matters are not so easily tested; this – the fourth statement about assessment – follows logically from the third. If some aspects of reading are accessible and can be assessed effectively, then it may be inferred that other aspects cannot. Premise two holds that responding to imaginative writing involves, to a significant extent, mental activities of an intangible nature, activities that do not lend themselves readily to being assessed as performances. One respondent agreed with the assessment statement, while the others disagreed. One of the latter cited lack of time as “the only problem” getting in the way of being “fully involved” in one piece of work. This implies that given more time, “essential matters” could be tested satisfactorily. Another respondent disagreed with the notion that essential matters are not easily testable on the grounds that the availability or non-availability of clear criteria for assessment was the key factor. By implication then, at least two of the respondents would not be in agreement with premise two of this thesis, which holds that core reading processes, because they are not accessible, cannot be tested in ways that ‘performances’ can be.

…Response and reflection do not lend themselves readily to testing, so should therefore not be evaluated. Strong disagreement was the unanimous response to this, the fifth statement. One reason offered was that there are ways and means of evaluating such processes, and that they need to be found and applied. Another respondent argued that such things are difficult to mark and assess, “especially for educators set in the old mindset”, but “far more rewarding for those
really interested in cultivating a love for English and even ‘life”’. While both acknowledge that reflection and response are not straightforward or simple to assess, they reject the idea that they should not be assessed at all. Neither, however, refers explicitly to the idea that responses are unique to individual readers, or that they are essentially inner processes, and that these two concepts may need to be kept in mind when finding ways of evaluating intangible elements of reading.

The sixth statement (closely associated with the previous two) is as follows: *Teachers often compromise, testing what seems testable, and hoping for the best with the remainder. This is to be expected.* The second sentence introduces an element of the ‘devil’s advocate’ – it is ‘acceptable’ that teachers be pragmatic in their assessment practice. One respondent agreed (without elaboration), two disagreed (one said it is “the norm” but is not necessarily “a good thing”), while the fourth (LJ) strongly disagreed. LJ argued that truly professional and dedicated educators would not compromise in this manner, as “they have the ‘big picture’”. Once again, teachers should find ways of incorporating all elements of reading in their assessment strategies. This stance is in harmony with one of the underlying principles (the fourth) outlined in the opening section of this chapter. This principle holds that responses relate to readers as whole people, and not to fragmentable items of skill or knowledge that can be demonstrated. LJ’s response is that one should not merely test what is readily testable. Another possible response might be that the whole question of assessment in literature needs to be examined carefully – for example, *should* response be assessed?

One of the respondents (CW) in the individual interviews (discussed in the next chapter), maintained that not all aspects of literature need to be assessed as such (or at least assessed in the same way), and that individual response is frequently evaluated informally in the classroom, for example during discussion activities. This point of view offers a positive, confident slant to the issue raised in statement six, which speaks of teachers “hoping for the best” with activities that do not seem testable to them.
LJ also strongly disagrees with the next statement: *What is tested becomes the most important part of the curriculum, and what is not tested is neglected.* This is to be expected, as LJ clearly does not believe in compromising the integrity of reading activities on account of inconvenient assessment practices. She argues that there are “many forms of evaluating and all are important in the final assessment of the learner”, adding that the teacher “needs good time management skills”. The latter is but one indication that experience and confidence play a role in shaping educators’ views about assessing the less tangible aspects of learning. Her belief in the manifold ways of evaluating also moves the argument forward in a positive manner, one not unlike that expressed by CW in her individual interview (reported on in chapter seven). Two of LJ’s colleagues disagreed (less strongly) with the view that what is tested becomes the most important part of the curriculum; one suggested that “everything should have the same value” when OBE is properly implemented, but that when one tries to marry the old with the new, “we fall short”. This response is not elaborated upon. One respondent agreed with statement seven but offered no explanation.

What is particularly interesting about the eighth statement is that it brings assessment directly to bear on two of the central premises that underpin the argument in this thesis, namely the uniqueness and the changing nature of a reader’s engagement with text. *It is difficult to test, in any traditional sense, the students’ unique and changing interactions with the literature* drew a variety of responses. In her response, LJ underlined the words “traditional sense” when indicating her agreement with the statement. This is consistent with her views regarding the two previous statements, where she pointed out the need for educators to bear in mind the ‘big picture’, and that there are many ways to assess responses to literature. She observes that if the testing of students’ unique and changing interactions depended on traditional testing, then “it never did (happen)”. LJ, who throughout her written responses to the questionnaire and during the group interview with her colleagues, maintained a strongly positive
stance towards OBE and Curriculum 2005, adds that teachers now have a “golden opportunity to move forward”. Two of her colleagues also agreed with the statement, but offered no reasons for doing so. The fourth one disagreed, noting that the testing of students’ unique and changing interactions with literature “must be done through careful observation and relevant questioning”, which “takes time and careful planning”. The same teacher mentioned time constraints in his/her response to statement four, which suggests that what might seem to be sound in theory, does not necessarily work out in practice.

The unique and changing nature of a reader’s interaction with texts informs premises one and three of this study. Premise one, which claims that the unique circumstances of an individual’s background and experience predispose him or her to respond idiosyncratically to a given text, implies that readers’ responses cannot be anticipated. It further implies that planning learning outcomes on the basis of individual readers’ responses is problematic. Premise one is built on underpinning principle 6.1.9 in part one of this chapter: “Readers are unique individuals whose personal schemata / perspectives are influenced by prior and ongoing experience”, while the implication of this premise is stated as principle 6.1.10: “It is inappropriate to try and predict how readers in general will respond to particular texts, or to specify reading outcomes in advance of particular activities that are subject to assessment”. Premise three claims that response to imaginative texts is an ongoing, developmental process, while principle 6.1.6 in the opening section of this chapter states that responses are “formative and developmental and evolve over a period of time, as demonstrated in cognitive / schemata theory”. 6.1.9, as seen above, also refers to “ongoing experience”.

The ninth and last statement about assessment could be taken as a somewhat mischievous concluding comment: *Sometimes it is more important to test something comparatively insignificant than to teach something significant*. It drew agreement from one respondent (who applied it to the last lesson on a Friday), unqualified disagreement from another, while two strongly disagreed. One of the
latter maintained that anything that she teaches is significant, “or I would not bother to teach it”, while LJ commented that this was a way out for “lazy educators” only. The last two respondents’ comments appear to support some of the principles arising from reader response criticism contained in section one of this chapter, notably 6.1.2 (easily testable aspects of reading “do not have much to say about how readers experience fiction”), 6.1.3 (the notion of competency) and 6.1.4 (the focus on fragmentable items of knowledge or skill rather than on holistic responses).

Overall, the responses to the above nine statements about assessment in literature study reveal that different respondents interpret some of the issues differently, in some instances with more of a pragmatic approach than in others. The responses of LJ in particular suggest the need to approach the assessment of literature in a more holistic manner. This is certainly in line with the argument that reading is not a process that should be atomised in the way it is assessed. The view also emerges that assessment can be done in a variety of ways, and that assessment of the less tangible, more creative side of reader response should not be neglected merely because it is not as easy to assess as other kinds of activities. None of the respondents raises any objection to the notion of outcomes as a basis for devising and assessing learning activities, however. None of the respondents seems prepared to adopt a strongly pragmatic approach to assessment, although there is a suggestion that one or two appear to acknowledge that some practices do take place because they are expedient, rather than inherently sound. Two of the four respondents offered virtually no motivation for their answers, hence making it difficult to draw any proper conclusions regarding their stance in relation to particular issues.
6.3 Group interview with Teachers’ Centre (DoE) personnel

It is the business of Department of Education training personnel to be both knowledgeable about school curriculum matters and aware of the needs that teachers have when implementing the curriculum in their classrooms. Interviewing the trainers, based at the Port Elizabeth Teachers’ Centre, thus provided the opportunity for understanding how they interpret the role of literature in the OBE curriculum, and for gaining insight into the impact of OBE on the teachers themselves.

Going into the interview, my intention was to keep the underlying principles I had identified about reader response criticism (points 6.1.1 to 6.1.10 in this chapter) in the foreground as much as possible. Owing to the fact that I would be interviewing not teachers, but teacher trainers, I devised ten questions as special points of reference that might help to throw light on their perspectives regarding the curriculum and the teachers’ responses to it (see Appendix 6). The subheadings used in the following discussion are therefore based on these questions. The latter in turn relate to points 6.1.1 to 6.1.10 - essential aspects of reader response that underpin the investigation as a whole. It hardly needs mentioning, however, that the (semi-structured) interview was subject to the dynamics of group interaction and the responses to points raised, which had the effect of generating a fairly spontaneous course for the discussion that took place.

The four teacher trainers who participated in the interview were (in order of ‘appearance’) DS, DA, CB and LL. Although they are familiar with the revised National Curriculum Statement, they have not yet embarked upon training for this curriculum as they have been completing the relevant workshops for the outgoing Curriculum 2005. In the case of the Intermediate Phase, the existing curriculum will continue to run in 2003 and 2004.
The following account of the interview is structured according to the questions contained in Appendix 6, followed by a description and analysis of the responses.

6.3.1 What level of readiness for teaching languages do you find among teachers who attend training workshops?

The responses to this question are revealing in terms of certain problem areas in Eastern Cape classrooms. DS described the majority of the teachers whom she and her colleagues work with as lacking a “reference field” in literature. Not brought up in a literary culture, teachers are still not “doing anything about it”, and this is a cause of great frustration for training staff. Teachers’ own lack of reading background extends to their not knowing where to access suitable texts for their particular purposes. Curriculum 2005, not being prescriptive regarding content or method, leaves much to the initiative and resourcefulness of educators, and so inadequacies in this area mean a very limited base for success.

Even the teachers who had been selected to assist the training personnel to work out learning programmes for the various grades “don’t … go out and find stories and poems; they want to go and write it [sic] themselves”. According to DS, the textbooks are not helpful either, so a lack of resources is a fundamental problem from the outset. Enterprising teachers could, however, attempt to address this shortfall by virtue of their own efforts. CB referred to research done in the Eastern Cape, which revealed a four-year lag in terms of expected reading proficiency. For example, “a Grade 9 learner is reading as if he is a Grade 5 learner”, which to CB amounts to a “state of emergency”.

It is not only the inadequacy in their own reading backgrounds that creates real difficulties for teachers in the classroom, but also a lack in terms of teaching skills and methodologies, according to LL. All of this has the effect of undermining the teachers’ confidence, which must have a seriously inhibiting effect on whatever they may wish to achieve in the literature classroom. The trainers attempt to do
something about this during their workshops, but more sustained, longer-term assistance is what is needed. The Teachers’ Centre staff admitted that it was simply not possible to follow up teachers’ progress in the schools themselves, as they (the trainers) were too booked up with workshops, and they could not merely walk into a school for a visit, but had to make arrangements in advance, which could sometimes be logistically challenging.

From what the training personnel said with regard to the teachers’ readiness to teach languages in their schools, the shortfall in their own education and in their exposure to reading creates a fundamental difficulty that spills over into every area of classroom teaching.

6.3.2 Where does the emphasis lie in Learning Outcome 3 (Reading and Viewing) in the revised National Curriculum Statement? How does it compare with the previous versions, and with Curriculum 2005?

At various times, different respondents have implied that the assessment of reading is not confined to those outcomes that explicitly target reading (and viewing) – for example specific outcome 3 in Curriculum 2005 and learning outcome 3 in the revised curriculum. This has been supported by observations that fiction per se is not a topic for separate study in the Intermediate Phase, or again, that children’s reading is assessed across a wide range of contexts. Different contexts include different kinds of reading, for example engaging with an imaginative text, or reading for factual information – what Rosenblatt refers to as “aesthetic” and “efferent” reading, respectively (1978: 24). In this interview, DS reported that they had developed training manuals that show how reading can be assessed from specific outcome 1 through to 7, along with the associated assessment criteria. In other words, the assessment of reading ability is not confined to specific outcome 3.
Productive language skills are also linked to reading. As DS points out, they might take the first specific outcome (“…making and negotiating meaning…”) and, basing it on a reading, for example a poem, create a personal text; or it could be based on reading a newspaper article. This reinforces the impression that the reading of fiction or poetry does not necessarily get separate treatment in the curriculum, but is part of a wider reading programme that targets a wide range of skills. It has already been noted that in both Curriculum 2005 and the NCS, the vast bulk of reading activity is associated either with the acquisition of knowledge about literary conventions, or with the acquisition of skills required for more “efferent” types of activities. The reader-response principle identified as 6.1.2 in this chapter holds that these kinds of activities, given so much weight in the curriculum, do not reveal much about the reading experience itself when applied to “aesthetic” engagements. What is said in this interview corroborates the view that most reading activity is not directed at such engagements. As DS reported, “…SO3 is of course the one (focusing mainly on reading)... can the learner express an initial response to texts; can the learner identify and discuss various literary effects; can the learner link his or her personal life...” These are based on texts. “But a lot of the other things are also based on texts”.

Ultimately, the success of a curriculum depends in large measure on the teacher, as various respondents have pointed out. Whatever emphasis may appear to be given in the curriculum to the creative side of reading, it is what the teacher makes of it that counts. DS’s plea is eloquent: “(teachers) never read; we’re sitting with teachers that can’t read. How on earth can they open up anything or be creative with the child?”

6.3.3 What do you associate with the term ‘reader response’, particularly in regard to imaginative works such as fiction and poetry?

This question was answered indirectly in much that was said in response to the previous question. On the other hand, the concept of reader response had no
scope for being ‘unpacked’ in a manner that would throw much light on any of the three premises supporting this investigation. Preoccupation with the deficiencies in teachers’ educational backgrounds tended to overshadow some of the potentially finer points of discussion. In a sense it is not inappropriate that little attention was given to what constitutes an “aesthetic” reading experience, as the chief concern with reading, from the teacher trainers’ point of view, is the empowerment of teachers with regard to the teaching of reading across the curriculum. That being so, the principle that personal response, incorporating both cognitive and affective dimensions, lies at the heart of reading imaginative texts (6.1.1 and 6.1.5 in this chapter) was not really tested.

6.3.4 Do you think teachers should be encouraged to accept the unique contribution that individual readers bring to their reading?

This question met with a positive response. Although, as DS pointed out, it is “a long process to get children (to come up with their own meanings) … and you need skilled teachers to do that”, knowing about children’s backgrounds is of great importance. DA referred to the time when, as a lecturer in English literature at a College of Education, she found it imperative to allow for both the “cultural gap” between one student and another, and for the “schemata of particular students” as well. “But with my schemata, I had these questions … what is he saying here, what does he mean? Because I couldn’t make the association that they made”.

When I asked how one actually assesses responses that are deeply meaningful for particular learners, or whether one should assess them at all, whether it can be a product or something ‘on paper’, DA replied that her number one priority was to understand the cultures of both the writer and the reader. “To know the culture of the learner is a step towards assessing”. She added that for “some things, you cannot really give a symbol for something”. LL stated that they tell teachers, “before you even think about planning, teaching, whatever, you need to
get to know these learners”. She exhorts teachers to “try and use the different cultures, not as a threat, but as a resource”. If a teacher lacks understanding of the “cultures, the social and the emotional scenes of where all these children come from”, if the teacher does not allow herself to get involved, how can she assess, if she doesn't “really know what is happening”?

The message is clear: get to know your learners before you can even think about how you will assess their readings of texts. What these respondents are saying here is that it is not enough merely to allow for differences in schemata in the different learners; teachers must also become familiar with at least the broad differences between backgrounds that can determine differences in schemata. Meeting this challenge, however, becomes even more difficult in contexts such as very large classes in historically disadvantaged schools. One may conclude that, despite the obstacles, an important principle espoused in this thesis, that readers bring their own unique personal schemata to what they read (6.1.9 in this chapter), is strongly endorsed by these respondents.

6.3.5 Could you identify two or three really important teaching and learning outcomes for reading in the Intermediate Phase?

As was the case with 6.3.3, this question was not directly addressed in the sense of imaginative reading. Outcomes were discussed within the broader context of all types of reading, as reported in 6.3.2. Once again, a possible focus on finer details of reading in the classroom tended to be ‘upstaged’ by concerns about the capacity of teachers to cope with reading across the broader curriculum.

6.3.6 What sorts of knowledge, values, competencies etc. do the assessment standards of LO3 – Reading and Viewing – appear to be targeting?

This question is, in effect, a possible response to question 6.3.5, but like the latter, was not directly answered. When I pointed out that with each version of the
curriculum, more and more attention was given to skills such as identifying, analysing and classifying and less to affective response to texts, DS insisted that the fault did not lie with the curriculum. “The possibilities are there, but it's up to us or the teacher to see the possibilities ... and unfortunately they don't see the possibilities ... we talked about getting back to basics for the teachers”. LL added that the opportunity was there for the teacher to be as creative as she wished or was able to be, but that the curriculum was “certainly not limiting”.

I could not escape concluding that we were somehow missing one another on this point. One may argue, on the one hand, that the curriculum itself provides evidence that overwhelming emphasis is given to “efferent” kinds of reading, and that even the small part that does pay attention to “aesthetic” reading, is subject to planning and assessment practices that are largely inappropriate to it. On the other hand, one may argue – quite correctly – that a teacher need not be limited by a curriculum, but may use it as a point of departure for learning activities that will achieve worthwhile outcomes. Similarly, a teacher need not be constrained by the assessment practices implicit in the assessment criteria or standards that appear in curricula. These teacher trainers, like several of the teachers who participated as respondents, did not even begin to engage with the conceptual difficulties raised in this investigation. In the case of the teachers, they were more concerned with the practicalities of coping with the added burden imposed by OBE, or else simply ignored many of the outcomes and associated criteria, and did what they wanted to do anyway. In the case of the Teachers’ Centre staff, the more pressing concern was to try to find ways of empowering the teachers who attended their workshops to be resourceful and to think for themselves.

6.3.7 How does one measure the success of a child’s reading activity? Can this be done in any precise way? Should this be tested? How do you help the teachers with this?
In posing this question I hoped to scratch at the surface of assessment practices in OBE and begin to reveal why certain practices take place and whether they should take place. In order to ‘set the scene’, I referred to the ‘invisible’ nature of reading (point 6.1.5 of the present chapter and premise two of this thesis), to the difficulties involved in demonstrating outcomes with regard to processes that were not accessible. I also raised the issue of whether the “things that you can’t actually see, that you can’t actually assess on a rubric” were perhaps under-emphasised in the curriculum because of this.

DA suggested that a conundrum facing the educator is how to assess what is essentially a receptive skill such as making meaning out of a text. Producing evidence of this is the difficulty, and so the evidence that she would be looking for was a language production skill such as reading aloud or writing. This comes close to Spady’s notion of an outcome being a demonstration of what learners can do with what they know or understand, the “tangible application of what has been learned” (1994: 2).

CB favoured a practical approach to the question of how to assess reading. In order to help teachers cope with the assessment criteria, he and his colleagues turned them into assessment questions and encouraged teachers to ask themselves what they expect their learners to be able to do. With reading, for example, “can they use the appropriate tone, register and body language?” The next step would be how to assess what they would be looking for. To this end, CB differentiated between assessment methods, tools and criteria to distinguish between, say formal or informal assessment, between different instruments such as rubrics and other techniques and between different things that learners should show they are able to do.

DS was of the opinion that there were, nevertheless, things that educators would not be able to assess, “because the child can’t express himself”, which creates problems, because “people can’t express what they feel, what they think”. CB
was of the opinion that there should be a “long list of possible products for assessment for LLC”. Even with regard to reading, some products could be written, some oral, and others visual – evidence the learner must produce in order to show “he is on his way to achieve the outcome”. He and his colleagues had recently been exposing their teachers to “a variety of possible products for assessment, tangible evidence that the learner is achieving.”

What was said here about assessment reveals a perception on the part of the trainers that solutions had to be found for practical difficulties that were exerting considerable pressure on teachers. The latter were required to integrate relevant assessment methods, tools and criteria into their planning for specified outcomes with regard to their teaching. The training staff admitted that it was a very real challenge for them to equip teachers to fulfil such tasks within the parameters of four-day workshops. One assessment practice that offered more potential for creative processes was the journal that teachers were encouraged to keep, in which they noted learners’ strengths and weaknesses. Learners were also to keep journals for reflection and self-assessment.

The discussion about assessment produced a variety of ideas that could be considered helpful to teachers struggling to cope with a relatively new curriculum in the classroom. Most parts of question 6.3.7 – the how parts of the question – were answered quite directly. There is, however, another part to the question: Should the idiosyncratic, inaccessible, formative and creative reading responses, the workings of the imagination, be tested as products for possible assessment? Preoccupations with the challenges of empowering and implementing teachers did not leave space for this question to be addressed. There was consequently little engagement with the challenges presented by the three premises of this investigation and the core issues of reader response (6.1.1 to 6.1.10). For the purposes of this session, therefore, a central issue remains unresolved, namely the conceptual difficulty of reducing a creative activity to the level of competence that must be demonstrated.
6.3.8 How should teachers try to plan their outcomes for reading activities? How would you respond to the suggestion that planning outcomes for responding to fiction is largely irrelevant to what reading is really about?

Near the beginning of the interview I posed the question whether a teacher could pre-select teaching and learning outcomes for the reading of imaginative texts. I asked whether that sort of thing was ‘plannable’, and could be tested in terms of the outcomes achieved. It was at this point that DS made her observation about teachers lacking a reference field in reading, which was, arguably, a matter of greater import than the one that I had raised. DA added that teachers were having difficulty understanding what outcomes actually mean. “You need to know what you’re going to assess before you even walk into that class – why are you doing reading, what do you want to achieve?” Teachers expressed uncertainty about why they were going to “use” a story, and difficulties in “thinking up different activities” relating to particular stories. If this was the case, then the conceptual issue about assessing outcomes for processes of reading by means of observable activities is premature. Trainers first need to get their teachers ‘on board’ through ‘understanding’ what they are doing and why they are doing it.

DS described a very basic brainstorming activity that teachers were encouraged to try out in the language classroom. It was based on learners being asked to make associations between a particular stimulus – for example a colour – and anything their imaginations could produce from their life experience. From very austere beginnings, where the children could think of almost nothing, to ever-lengthening lists of associations days or weeks later, teachers could observe definite progress being made, and could hence set down particular outcomes for their class groups. Teachers therefore need to set realistic targets for their learners in accordance with their socio-economic circumstances and reading background. Equally, as was pointed out, the knowledge, skills and confidence of
the teachers themselves are highly significant factors in determining what they are capable of planning, implementing and assessing in their own classrooms.

6.3.9 Is there a fair balance between intellectual and emotional elements in the assessment standards / SOs / AC etc. when it comes to reading?

I observed that there is very little reference in either Curriculum 2005 or the NCS to the affective dimension of response to imaginative texts. In the case of fiction, an example would be where a reader might feel strongly that events have taken an unjust turn – “that’s not fair!” – or a happy or sad turn, or might experience strong feelings of empathy for a character. Instead, there is a preponderance of cognitive / intellectual reading skills in the curriculum, skills such as skimming and scanning, analysing, making connections – all of them important, but disproportionately represented in a section of the syllabus dealing with reading and viewing. LL agreed, pointing out that the same applied from the Foundation Phase all the way through to the higher grades.

Despite what DS said earlier about deficiencies in the quality of reading activities not being the fault of the curriculum, I pointed out that “I still don’t see written evidence that these things are important… that what’s written there attaches 90-plus percent importance to the skills of reading, (what) you’re going to need to be functionally effective in society”. LL explained that the difficulty teachers encountered with Curriculum 2005 was that they were allowed more freedom to be creative than they could cope with. The latest curriculum was more limiting in the sense that it spelled out in greater detail the kinds of things teachers should be doing in their teaching of reading, which makes it easier for teachers, in a sense.

For myself, however, the real issue was what the curriculum was saying to teachers about where they should place the greatest emphasis in classroom reading activities. It appears that an instrumental view of reading prevails, one
that takes into account the social and economic needs of society rather than the growth of people as human individuals. Principle 6.1.5 in this chapter states the following: “Responses are essentially inner processes containing cognitive and affective dimensions (enabling readers to perceive relationships, make judgements, empathise, predict, express emotion and a sense of identity)”. In the justifiable concern about teachers attaining adequate levels of self-reliance, knowledge and confidence in their field, a vital and defining element of response to fiction is not taken up as an issue in the department’s current in-service teacher training.

As Rosenblatt pointed out more than sixty years ago, “the literary experience penetrates to the core of personality, because it affects both thought and feeling” and “can be an important means of bringing about the linkage between intellectual perception and emotional drive” (1938: 215). This ought to be as true today as it was then, yet in the context of many classrooms in South Africa – certainly in the Eastern Cape – this is a matter, like the issue about planning outcomes for reading processes, that is still unacknowledged.

6.3.10 Is there any consistency about the way different schools, or different teachers at a particular school implement OBE?

This matter was not addressed in the course of the interview; it was clear that the trainers were attempting to cope with a general problem about teachers’ capacity to implement OBE in their schools.

Concluding comments:

My conclusions about responses to questions 6.3.5 to 6.3.9 have sounded a common theme: the conceptual issues raised in these questions assume a level of functionality in the context of classroom teaching that, in reality, should not be
taken for granted. The Teachers’ Centre training staff reveals a different kind of perspective with regard to literature teaching in the context of C2005. It is one that views the ‘real’ issues in implementing OBE in the LLC learning area as being far more rudimentary than any issues to do with the conceptual incompatibility between creative response and demonstrations of competence.

For this reason I felt that there was not enough convergence between what I considered to be crucially important and what the trainers kept bringing into the discussion. One could speak of their adopting almost a ‘default’ view of the profession they are involved with. The teachers’ lack of background assumed major importance in the discussion about how they were coping with literature study in an OBE context. Consequently their lack of knowledge about literary texts was more significant, because it was more problematic, than their awareness of any inconsistency between reading responses and certain types of assessment. Equally, the teachers’ poor methodological base was a matter of greater urgency than whether they would be able to distinguish between “aesthetic” and “efferent” purposes in their pupils’ reading. That such difficulties might assume greater importance than conceptual issues was anticipated in the introductory chapter (sub-section 1.4.4) with regard to schools that might offer no support because of being dysfunctional or apathetic.

There was a degree of consensus among the trainers that teachers should be ‘armed’ with as comprehensive a list as possible of assessment “products” in relation to reading. There was no reference to such a ‘solution’ having nothing to do with ‘empowering’ the teachers in the longer term, however. Many of these assessment “products” have little to do with imaginative engagements with fiction or poetry, but cover a wide range of reading skills. There was also no reference to whether it was appropriate to ‘match’ the processes of personal response with such an instrumental view of assessment, one that sees learning, including response to literature, in an atomised way.
Herein lies a danger: it may seem a worthwhile short or medium-term goal to boost teachers’ levels of competence in the classroom when these are so obviously lacking. However, the vision of in-service training may well stop short of getting teachers to reflect in sufficient depth about the underlying assumptions that they will be taking into the teaching of literature.

The trainers did not engage directly with the main conceptual issues of this thesis, but the perspectives they offer clearly show how and why such issues can be glossed over. There is abundant evidence that most of the respondents in this interview grasp the role that literature can play in terms of growth and aesthetic development. Their references to teachers’ lack of personal growth and development through exposure to literature are but one manifestation of this understanding. There is a tendency, on the other hand, for the respondents to allow more practical issues to claim centre stage, even to the point where they seem to betray an instrumentalist view of reading activities and assessment. What this does, however, is to highlight the conceptual issues even further.
CHAPTER SEVEN: THEORY AND PRACTICE - INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS

7.1 Looking for common ground: semi-structured interviews

As indicated at the beginning of the previous chapter, semi-structured interviews are included in my research methodology in order to create opportunities for open-ended discussion about teaching and assessing literature in an OBE environment. I held individual interviews with four practising teachers, one of whom had previously responded to the questionnaire discussed in chapter five. A second respondent did complete the questionnaire, but handed it to me on the day of the interview, so I had no prior knowledge of her stance with regard to the issues raised in the questionnaire. (Her input is therefore not included in the discussion in chapter five.) The fourth interviewee had not seen the questionnaire at all and was not asked at any stage to respond to it. The fact that two of them had seen the questionnaire prior to the interviews, while two had not, is not relevant. I did not refer specifically to the questionnaire, which had given away very little about my own conceptual concerns, and I also wanted to engage the interviewees in critical debate about the issues informing the argument of this thesis. Moreover, the interviews took place more than six months after the questionnaires were completed.

Appendix 7 contains fifteen questions designed to focus attention, during the individual interviews, on the key arguments of this thesis. I did not, however, attempt to adhere strictly to the sequence of these questions, nor did any one interview follow quite the same course as any other. It was important that each interviewee had the opportunity to follow his or her own line of thought and for either party to respond to points being made. Nevertheless, all of the issues listed in Appendix 7 were addressed, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the particular circumstances and inputs of each interviewee. Moreover, I could not assume that every interviewee would be familiar with the conceptual frame of
reference underpinning my investigation, particularly the notion of outcomes understood as ‘plannable’ demonstrations of competence, in relation to learning processes perceived to be idiosyncratic and inaccessible. For this reason, I prefaced each interview with a brief overview of my research arguments, in the hope that this would provide a more meaningful context for the issues being addressed.

Two of the interviewees teach in the primary school and the other two at high school. Of the former, CW has had many years of experience teaching grades 4 to 7 in a single-sex former “Model C” (formerly ‘white’) school, and MH has taught for seven years at a state-aided Catholic convent school, which, to all intents and purposes, is now a state school. Of the high school teachers, NH has taught English for five years, one of which was in Ireland, and taught in both single-sex and co-educational state schools this year (2002). ZN is an experienced teacher of English at a co-educational “township” school that came into existence ten years ago when the anti-apartheid schools boycott ended.

While the teaching of CW and MH has been confined to grades 4 to 7, and the lowest grade taught by NH and ZN is Grade 8, all have had experience of teaching English within the OBE system of Curriculum 2005. All consequently have a working knowledge of the curriculum, as well as experience in trying to make it work in their classrooms. A fact that should be borne in mind is that the first point at which official assessment takes place is at the end of Grade 9, the culmination of the General Education and Training band of learning. It could therefore be reasonable to expect that a teacher of Grade 9 would face pressures of a kind not associated with the earlier grades.

One of the anomalies of the South African schooling system is that in most cases, Grade 7 is part of the primary school structure, yet falls outside the Intermediate Phase / Key Stage Two. Grade 7 is the first year of the Senior Phase, the second and third years of which take place in the high school. This
means that high school teachers have little if any influence over what happens in the first year of a teaching and learning phase that they must see to its conclusion. The situation could become even more ‘problematic’ when there is little consistency in approaches to implementing OBE between the different ‘feeder’ schools, or even within one particular school.

In order to provide a detailed critical account of the respondents’ views regarding the key issues under discussion, I refer directly to comments they make, which, together with my own commentary, makes for lengthy passages of text. This seems to be an inevitable result of pursuing a qualitative approach to empirical enquiry. Because of this, the transcripts of the four interviews are not included in the appendices of this thesis.

7.2 Interviewees’ responses to specific issues

7.2.1 Amount of time spent on literature study

CW points out that although the reading of fiction is definitely promoted, the study of literature per se does not take place in the junior school. Speaking for Grade 5, where she currently teaches English, CW mentions that there is always a book that she is busy reading “with” and “to” the class, but that the skills of reading – for study, for information, and so on, also receive attention. She deals with different kinds of texts. “Some of them are fiction, but not all of them”. One could therefore conclude that character analysis and knowledge about the conventions of fiction, given quite a strong weighting in the latest version of the OBE curriculum, are not the subject of formal study in this school. CW has “always done that in an informal way”. This last point is taken further in the discussion about assessment.

MH, who teaches English in grades 5, 6 and 7, refers to a “poetry component, where we study different figures of speech, as well as a novel that we study quite
in depth, and get responses from that”. He explains that character development receives particular attention, mentioning the example of *I am David* where there are opportunities for young readers to relate strongly to the developing character in the story. When elaborating on getting “responses from that” within the context of studying the novel, he refers to “guided responses” as well as the eliciting of spontaneous reactions from readers. Overall, literature comprises a substantial portion of English studies in the classes he teaches, and importance is attached to reader response.

As could be expected, the study of a novel is very much a part of the English curriculum at high school level. NH requires her pupils to read chapters at home, but also covers part of the text during class, where she elicits their “very *now* feelings about what they’ve read”. After discussion, readers can reassess what they said before, but NH is “very mistrustful” of attaching an outcome to that, as it would be “ludicrous” to set an outcome such as “the child must have changed her mind about the book”. From early in her discussion of how she goes about teaching a novel, NH raises issues about the role of outcomes in relation to what she does in the classroom.

Much of the English teaching done by ZN is what she calls “necessary” in order to support learning in other areas of the curriculum. She appears to have struck a meaningful level of integration between English and Arts and Culture, “where we do a lot of poetry”. Storytelling obviously plays a significant role in her teaching too – “I find storytelling a very useful tool with teaching English – with language, for instance, with vocabulary, with a whole lot of things”. That this is an entirely appropriate approach to integrated teaching practices may be seen in the context of her school, where the mother tongue of practically all learners is Xhosa, and not English. ZN uses storytelling with older pupils as well, “because children love storytelling”. ZN does not follow an ‘academic’ approach to literature study in her high school, and is sensitive to the likes and needs of her learners. She also refers to the use of the imagination in storytelling and spontaneity when doing
role-play; this raises some interesting implications regarding the issue of planned outcomes and related assessment procedures.

7.2.2 The meaning and importance of reader response: (Appendix 7, points 3-6)

For CW, response covers a wide range, from initial response, to more considered responses following discussion, as well as the kinds of answers that need to be supported through textual references. In her opinion, the use of worksheets can be overdone, “which … for me, kills the whole thing”. Most of what CW has to say about response is said in relation to how response may be assessed; there was no apparent need to ‘unpack’ the meaning of response in terms of how it is described in this investigation. As to whether responses can be assessed in a tangible way or not, CW says that for her it has never been about “formal assessment” and that there are “lots of other ways to assess”.

MH elaborates on the idea of guided response by referring to “higher-order questions”. Examples include “Did you like the way the book ended? If you did, why? If not why not?” He encourages them to interpret the text for themselves. The element of character ‘analysis’ is incorporated into personal responses in examples such as “describe how you feel David has grown …”. As with CW, there was no occasion for having to go into detail about the private and idiosyncratic nature of reading; that individual readers have their own unique responses was not regarded as a matter for debate.

For NH the notion of understanding “what goes on in the child’s head”, as I put it to her, does not seem as important as the special interests that a child may have, and which would play a role in a child’s attitude towards reading, particularly with regard to certain kinds of books. According to NH, the response that a child brings to the reading of a text may be influenced by a number of factors, some of them as mundane as having a headache or being eager to please. Then there are the personal schemata and all the links between emotions. “All we have to
work on”, she says, is what the child gives out. She agrees that response is important, but is not sure “how it must be important”, being “distrustful” of systems that are too explicit about what can be accomplished or demonstrated. “The process of reading is so private”.

ZN makes two rather telling observations about response. One is that “literature is for enjoyment” and the other is that “feelings are the most important” aspect of literature. She claims that because she wants to get her learners’ responses to text, she makes a practice of withholding her own until they have had the chance to articulate how and what they feel.

While there are differences in the amount of emphasis that the above four place on structuring response-based activities – MH seems to go the furthest in this – all of the teachers are committed to allowing their pupils to explore their own responses to texts. All evidently believe that response is unique to individual readers and allow the experiences of readers, when engaging with books, to play an important role in the classroom. In some cases there is an early indication of assessment being a contentious matter in relation to authentic response. This is examined in more detail in a later section.

7.2.3 Learner-centred approaches to reading activities

All four respondents encourage their pupils to take an active part in their learning. CW, who involves her learners in many discussion and self-assessment activities, makes a point of telling them what outcomes are to be achieved, finding that this motivates them. MH also believes in transparency regarding the outcomes, as this helps learners to prepare better for tasks on which they are to be assessed. He also places great emphasis on eliciting the personal responses of his learners.
The learner-centred approach of NH is clearly seen in activities involving initial and subsequent responses and in her opting to allow the direction of her lessons to “go with the kids” should it run counter to intended lesson outcomes. A further manifestation of her approach is seen in her providing learners with assessment rubrics before they embark on written projects, which, apart from giving them useful guidance, has the effect of “demystifying the marking”. Her pupils are not reticent about coming forward and enquiring why, in terms of a particular rubric, they did not perform better, or how they could improve. As far as the approach of ZN is concerned, her views on storytelling activities are but one instance of her commitment to involving her learners, and making learning an experience for them rather than a mere ‘taking in of knowledge’.

7.2.4 Assessing learners’ reading responses

The issue of assessing readers’ responses turned out to be the one that elicited the most discussion, or linked up with most other matters dealt with in the interviews. From the outset CW states that some aspects of reading are assessed informally – “enjoyment is a big part of it, but the discussion of it … is done in an oral discussion way”, and that in the past “we’ve never had to report on it”. Chapter four of this thesis presents a detailed account of the weighting given in OBE curricula between 1998 and 2002, to the critical discussion of stylistic devices, character, and various social issues such as bias and stereotyping. Indeed, in the most recent version of the National Curriculum Statement, the learning outcome for Reading and Viewing (no.3) is supported by long lists of assessment standards aimed at enhancing learners’ reading skills, knowledge about literary conventions and capacity for critical discussion. In this interview CW holds that language teachers had never had to carry out formal assessments of such matters. The latest curriculum makes it very plain that this should now be done, and gives details of the kinds of activities targeted for the different grades in each phase of schooling. CW’s point is not that discussions that raise critical awareness are not worthy of attention; merely that there is “a
kind of natural progression” from reading the book to asking questions about it, “but it’s never been … a formal assessment”. CW mentions the example of a book recently read in which the narrative technique provided the source of much enjoyable discussion on the part of her pupils.

An aspect of assessment that CW finds particularly irksome is that “you’ve got to have something on paper” and that “you’ve got to show where you did it”. She believes that the majority of teachers would find the assessment standards of the latest curriculum quite daunting, as there is little guidance as to how activities like critically analysing and explaining are to be assessed. She sketches a scenario of teachers asking, “what exactly do you want me to do? How am I going to demonstrate that, because over and over again, the learning outcome is a demonstration of the ability to do something”. In literature, “I would say the only thing one needed to assess is where there is perhaps a concept involved, which you want defined and you want to make sure that they actually understand”, says CW. Forming opinions based on what the reader knows about a character and what is happening in the story so far can be assessed, “but I don’t think we have to assess every single response”.

MH mentions the study of character and stylistic devices amongst focal points for study in literature, areas in which it is important for learners to substantiate their responses. On the other hand, when it comes to someone’s “appreciation of a story”, or even their “aesthetic appreciation of a story”, he feels that “there’s no right and wrong to that, and you can’t actually assess it”. NH feels the same, despite the fact that she operates in the context of a high school. With regard to readers’ personal experience of a text “you can’t actually assess that”, she says, adding that “I find it very difficult to work out how I am to assess thirty-five children’s initial responses”, quite apart from any subsequent ones. Mention of the numbers in a class group suggests that logistical matters play some role in her view, but this is not of primary significance in the light of her saying that there
would have to be a lot of “writing and recording of information” in relation to “something that’s actually quite本能”（my emphasis）.

NH also comments that she is not partial to “breaking things up” into discrete little bits to be assessed. Describing this practice as a “bugbear” to her, she refers to a conversation she once had with William Spady, in which she asked him how one is expected to “record every miniscule little thing”, to which he replied that he never envisaged all the outcomes generated by the planners of Curriculum 2005 “and what it spawned”. For NH, the fragmenting of knowledge implied by Curriculum 2005, or OBE, is problematic both for envisaging outcomes as well as for assessing learners’ achievements. This relates directly to the principle listed as 6.1.4 in chapter six, namely that responses relate to readers as whole people with both intellect and emotions, and not to fragmentable items of skill or knowledge that can be demonstrated or performed.

For ZN, assessment of reading response is partly tied up with logistical matters. One of these relates to the large numbers of pupils per class – between forty and fifty – in her school. NH remarks on the difficulty of assessing thirty-five pupils’ initial and further responses; ZN speaks of up to fifty. In some historically disadvantaged schools, class numbers have been known to exceed fifty or even sixty, and there is little evidence that there has been general improvement with regard to this. The implications of such large classes not only for performing the assessments, but also for completing all the associated paperwork, are nothing short of staggering. What this implies for large numbers of school children across the country is far more serious, considering what they are likely to be denied in the field of literature study alone.

There is a further aspect of assessment, however, which troubles ZN, and this stems from the shortcomings apparent in the OBE training workshops arranged by the Provincial Department of Education, and attended by cohorts of teachers from various schools. These five-day workshops cover the background and
structures of Curriculum 2005, but sometimes fall short in spelling out crucial details relating to assessment procedures. As ZN observes, “they don’t really know what AC (assessment criteria) we should use”. Given the newness of Curriculum 2005 and OBE, there is not a great deal of successful practice over a number of years to reflect back upon. MH also comments that clear guidelines for assessment would have been helpful – “a clear pattern or path that they wanted us to tread on, instead of giving us this book to interpret and having a training session once a year”. He adds that teachers are encouraged to design their own rubrics, “but what I design might be totally different from what the high school may design”. What he does not mention is that the freedom to design their own rubrics is unlikely to be one that most teachers would be willing to cope with. It is in relation to this ‘freedom’ that CB, in the group interview with the trainers, mentioned the need to provide teachers with a whole multitude of “possible products of assessment”.

Assessment can also be difficult to implement effectively because of classroom arrangements when, as ZN puts it, “it’s not fairly distributed. Even when you are using groups, there are those who are loafing”. Judging from what ZN has to say, assessment is problematic because some of its procedures need clarification, and because the sheer size of the average class groups makes it a logistical ‘nightmare’. She does not raise any conceptual problems, however, in terms of how appropriate certain assessment practices might be with regard to individual readers responding to literature. Any lack of conceptual ‘fit’ here is far less likely to be a source of frustration or stress to her. ZN is clearly a committed and competent teacher, but some of the circumstances in which she works have the potential for disrupting effective classroom practice and hence for being the cause of distress. One of the conclusions I was able to draw from my interview with the Teachers’ Centre training staff was that conceptual infelicities must play second fiddle to more pressing challenges. In the case of that interview, however, the main difficulties related less to logistical challenges than to the background and experience of the teachers themselves. The views expressed by ZN serve to
show just how deeply rooted the problems relating to historically disadvantaged schools really are; and these problems do very little to encourage the strivings towards excellence exemplified by ZN.

7.2.5 The relevance of planning outcomes for reading responses

I suggested to CW that it was “presumptuous” and “wrong-headed” to think that one could legitimately select learning outcomes for responding to literature. How could one plan that children would feel this way, understand that, or discover something new? CW’s response indicated her dismissal of “the pre-determined answer”. In her opinion, “you can have that you expect them to come up with an answer but not the answer”. She believes that there is much in the text of a story, for example, about which there should be general agreement. Discussion can focus on textual details that can be cited as evidence to support certain points of view. “You’re going to pick up mistakes, if you want to call it that”, says CW, “but the point is, that person learns not that he’s wrong, that it’s important to look more carefully at the evidence”. For her, this is a valuable learning experience. “What has he learnt, to be better next time?”

This is not applicable, however, to all areas of individual response, and “it doesn’t occur to me … that they should all come up with the same answer”. In her comments about assessment, CW refers to the need for having “something on paper”, which links up with the need to produce “some kind of demonstration, and for me, I can’t stand them. I just can’t stand them”. This links up, in turn, with the “pre-determined kind of response”, which makes it “very difficult to keep it open” and one gets away from “what you can do in a discussion”. For CW, there is little point in reducing what should be a spontaneous interchange of opinion in a possibly informal setting, into a recorded demonstration of a competence that happens to be pinpointed in the pages of a curriculum.
While he does plan his work with outcomes in mind, MH finds that they do limit one. As he puts it “structure of any kind always limits you”. He adds “you can’t … explore something to its full extent within the structure and the limits that it has”. In practice, he chooses certain specific outcomes relevant to reading (or any other language activity), matches them to the associated assessment criteria and applies them to the work of the day. Sometimes, however, “it doesn’t quite work that way, and you have to start bending things to make it fit”. What does he bend, the outcomes and assessment criteria, or what is going on in the classroom? His answer to this question is: “Bend what I’m doing in class to adapt to that”. Does adapting classroom activities to keep in line with pre-selected outcomes not worry him? Does he feel pressure to tick off particular outcomes and criteria for the record? It is in answer to this question that MH commented about structure generally having a limiting effect. MH does not encounter any stress from having, on occasion, to adapt the direction that his teaching is taking to comply with pre-specified outcomes.

The reality of his situation as a teacher in what has become, effectively, a state primary school, is that “you have to submit your work to the department, and they are the watchdog”. “You do your best, and hope that you’re on the right track”, he observes. It does not appear that uncertainty about procedures is a factor for MH, although clearer guidelines from the department would have been welcome. The burden of all the paperwork presents a greater challenge. It is the initial work, he says, that is “extremely time-consuming” as well as “unrealistic, because you really burn the candle at both ends sometimes trying to set up activities”. One can understand that for a conscientious language teacher who is busy all day and carries a marking load as well, finding a workable, balanced approach to what he does in the classroom would be an important priority. MH does not articulate the same level of opposition to the concept of pre-selected outcomes and demonstrations of competence that one encounters with CW and NH.
Although she has completed only five years as an English teacher, NH pins a lot of faith on her ability to teach by instinct. She feels that while outcomes can provide a lot of structure and can perhaps be helpful for teachers when they are starting up, they “can just get in the way of a helpful, working method”. One reason for this is that “you have to stop to think, and then inevitably have to report”. This must be frustrating for an instinctive teacher, particularly, and one might not be surprised to learn that such teachers find a way of coping with outcomes as long as the latter are made to fit in with what they want to do, and not vice versa. NH finds it disturbing to have to “tick off” that a certain outcome has been met when, most likely, it has been based on “one piece of evidence”.

As to whether one should be exploring literature in an outcomes-based structure at all, NH responds negatively, venturing the opinion that “the actual act of reading isn’t an outcome”. Her concern is with the integrity of the teaching and learning process, and when the ‘natural’ direction is one way, but the outcomes point elsewhere: “The lesson isn’t going where it should be. You want to change it, but you have an outcome to achieve today”. The lesson “should be” going in a direction prompted by spontaneous learning events. “You want to go there, but you can’t do that; there’s no flexibility”. Faced with the need to adapt either the direction of the lesson or the pre-selected outcomes and assessment criteria if the two went in contrary directions, NH opts to “forget about the AC and SOs and go with the kids”. She adds that in all probability she would “sit afterwards and try to worm what I do into what was expected”.

By contrast, the notion of fitting imaginative and creative learner activities within the context of outcomes provides no difficulty for ZN. She explains that OBE arrived on the scene at the same time that she was upgrading her qualifications and changing her own style of teaching. She was in a position to attend the workshops presented by OBE specialists, William Spady and Roy Killen. As she puts it, “the issue of OBE being a demonstration of learning, I had it from the horse’s mouth”. Exposure to OBE presentations over a period of several weeks,
done in conjunction with her further studies, provided ZN with a positive base from which to involve her own pupils in OBE ways of learning. ZN was therefore not reliant merely on the five-day workshops that most other teachers attended. This, together with the fact that she was in some sort of self-renewal process regarding her own teaching, offered her a much better chance of engaging with OBE without feeling intimidated by it.

It has been noted previously that when the fundamental conditions for effective learning are in short supply or under extreme pressure, other less pressing debates in education tend to pale into insignificance. Central to this thesis is the question of linking readers’ engagements with imaginative literature to the concept of learning outcomes that are perceived as demonstrations of competence. I have used the word “premature” about relating this conceptual link between literature and OBE to historically disadvantaged institutions that have more urgent difficulties to contend with. The Teachers’ Centre personnel pointed to the reading background of the teachers themselves as an enormous problem area. ZN firmly believes that “lack of reading is the root cause of learners’ problems”. Focusing on the learners themselves, ZN identifies a fundamental deficiency in the conditions that are necessary for minimum learning efficiency. One might suggest that if pupils are unable to decode print or express themselves adequately, it scarcely matters whether their inadequacies are exposed in a quest to achieve pre-specified outcomes, or within more spontaneous learning situations.

7.2.6 Intellectual and emotional elements in readers’ responses

In discussing the learning outcomes for Reading and Viewing in the various curriculum statements, I have referred to the very small emphasis given to the affective element in reading. CW comments that the curriculum represents the bare minimum of what should take place, and that the success or otherwise of a curriculum depends on the teachers who implement it. That is “its strength and its
weakness”. It has been shown that in her own classroom, CW allows for plenty of
discussion; for her the main issue is what should or should not be assessed. She
does not feel restricted regarding what choices she makes.

MH states “there’s no right and wrong” to personal responses, but the chief
difficulty associated with affective elements of response such as enjoyment is
that it is “sometimes difficult to judge whether a child is actually enjoying it, or just
doing it because they think they’re being good students”. (This ties in with NH’s
comment about some pupils being “eager to please”.) MH does not really see a
problem in the ‘under-representation’ of emotions in reading in the curriculum. He
covers many of the cognitive reading skills with shorter texts that Rosenblatt
(1978) would place in the “efferent” category. As mentioned before, MH does
focus on literature study, and “seeing actually how they feel about things”.

For NH there is no question about the importance of feeling as a central element
in reader response. She feels that if the child “is not engaging on an emotional
level” when reading a work of fiction, “the book is not doing its job, largely”. Similarly, if there is practically no reading for enjoyment in the curriculum,
something is very wrong. “They’re not teaching kids to enjoy reading”. On the
other hand, “by not mentioning it too much, there’s less control over it”, says NH.
She leaves no doubt as to her attitude towards outcomes when she adds “we
won’t have some ridiculous block to be ticked off when the kid has demonstrated
that he has enjoyed” reading. In a sense then, one ‘redeeming’ feature of the
very low profile given to reading for enjoyment and other affective responses is
that the latter are not coupled to assessment criteria on any significant scale.

As far as ZN is concerned, it has already been mentioned that for her, feelings
are the most important aspect of literature. This is also implicit in her attitude
towards and encouragement of learner-active pursuits such as storytelling and
role-play, as well as in her belief that learners should give their own responses to
what they read before hearing those of the teacher.
7.2.7 Experience of OBE in the school

The way in which the OBE curriculum is practised within the wider school context can have a significant impact on an individual teacher. This does not apply very much in the case of CW, who believes that the success or otherwise of any curriculum depends on the individual teacher. Her colleagues were rather sceptical about OBE to begin with because “every group that went for training came back with something different”. Nevertheless, they have been adopting an experimental approach towards certain aspects of the new curriculum, and have been waiting for the final curriculum statement to become available. A highly competent and experienced teacher, CW is unlikely to be intimidated by any new curriculum demands. She likes the less detailed nature of the specific outcomes in the ‘old’ Curriculum 2005, “because it gives you more scope … I tend to see what I can do … I see the gaps rather than the limits”.

For MH, discontinuity between theory and practice presents a problem. In theory, teachers of one school phase sit together and determine what outcomes should be covered for the whole phase. When there are different schools of thought, one that believes in covering all specific outcomes in each grade, and another that thinks it impracticable, problems can arise. A lack of consensus can lead to a lack of continuity between grades and phases within the primary school and between the latter and high school. This is hence a source of anxiety among teachers. What happens prior to Grade 9 is critical, as MH points out, because learners are formally assessed at the end of this grade. MH refers to the abolition of a content-based curriculum as a further source of potential difficulty, especially as it affects poorly qualified teachers, of whom there are many in the school system.

A source of tension in MH’s experience is when the education authorities set time constraints on teachers for implementing unfamiliar aspects of new curricula. If
“you can’t phase it in according to your own plan, according to what you feel the kids should be doing” it becomes “nerve-wracking”. MH makes these comments in response to my question about how his phase of schooling is likely to switch over to the revised curriculum in 2005. I suggested to MH that despite the stress that he refers to, he knows how to absorb it and how to deal with the challenges of innovation. As he puts it, “you go according to the limits of your adaptability … and maintain some balance, and it works”. His contact with a wider circle of colleagues beyond his school leads him to believe, however, that “for a lot of people out there, a lot of them are still clueless about what to actually do”. He has been involved in the formation of support groups, “but they die out after a while, because people don’t actually come there to share ideas: they come there to take your work that you’ve prepared”.

In an OBE / Curriculum 2005 sense, 2002 was a year of two halves for NH. During the first half of the year she was at a school where she was expected to carry out a specified programme of outcomes, and so “tried very hard to do the right thing”. This led to considerable stress. “I was trying to push my teaching style into something that wasn’t accommodating”. Upon switching to a bigger school, she was left to her own devices, and relied on colleagues in charge of particular grades to alert her to essential OBE-related tasks that had to be done. NH acknowledges being in a privileged position: she was given the freedom to pursue her own teaching style, delivered probably much more than was expected of her and was an altogether happier person. Nevertheless, she has decided to leave conventional school teaching for various reasons, one of which is “the pressure that teachers are placed under to do something that isn’t very practical”.

What ZN says about her experience of implementing OBE in her school serves to underline, once again, the effects that a poor educational background and poor commitment can have on curriculum innovation. She enjoys no practical support from her principal, and at best, indifference on the part of her senior colleagues towards OBE. Consequently, there is “no control, no coordination at all”. Another
negative factor is the attitude of several colleagues who are involved in teaching OBE. They see no reason to attend more than one training workshop, and seem either blind to or indifferent towards the possibilities of professional growth. Finally, ZN reveals that the training workshops themselves are limited in that the training personnel are remote from the actual school context and do not get their hands on ‘real’ learners. She would appreciate it if the trainers realised the practical implications of some of the issues they raise. While ZN and her colleagues want training personnel to conduct training in the real school situation, one recalls that during the group interview with Teachers’ Centre staff, a common complaint was that their programme of workshops was so full that they did not even have time to conduct any follow-up visits to the schools.

7.3 Conclusions

The responses of the four teachers to issues raised in the interviews give a strong indication that each individual experiences the teaching of literature within a Curriculum 2005 / OBE framework differently. Various factors evidently play a role in this, including experience, personal motivation, temperament, confidence, educational background, social and teaching milieu, reading interests, personal teaching philosophy and professional orientation, amongst others.

Each of the interviewees brings something unique to the debate. CW projects a sense of great assurance and independent thinking that allows her to keep OBE in perspective. MH reflects a commitment to scrupulous endeavour balanced by an attitude of constructive criticism. NH is unequivocal about her opposition to major assumptions underlying OBE while keeping open a window on instinctive teaching. ZN is immersed in both the spontaneity of learner-centred teaching and the daunting challenges of trying to make OBE work in a non-supportive environment.
The conceptual difficulty of linking outcomes-driven demonstrations of competence with learning processes that are, in essence, impossible to assess in any precise manner, is put to the test in the course of these interviews. What emerges is that the introduction of (a form of) OBE via Curriculum 2005 impacts on different teachers differently. None of those interviewed remains untouched or unchallenged in some way by the advent of the new curriculum. Much depends on the capacity of the teacher’s immediate teaching environment to absorb pressure and translate it into an effective response. Much also depends on the stance adopted by the individual teacher, which is in turn influenced by a variety of personal factors. The interviews serve also to highlight the complex web of practical challenges that teachers face in their classrooms.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Overview

The conclusions arrived at in this chapter will be qualitative rather than quantitative, and to some extent even tentative. It would be inappropriate if I were to claim to have ‘proved’ the validity of my findings in an exploratory investigation such as this. I propose rather to reflect on my core hypothesis in the light of the theoretical and empirical components of the investigation detailed in the preceding chapters of this thesis.

The central hypothesis\(^3\) that was explored in this thesis is that response-orientated teaching of imaginative literature is conceptually incompatible with a system based on pre-selected learning outcomes, the achievement of which needs to be demonstrated by means of tangible evidence. (The conceptual dimension or problem.) Such incompatibility is a potential cause of tension for the teacher, who may need to adopt certain strategies in order to cope in the classroom. (The empirical dimension or problem.)

My procedure in this chapter is briefly to re-examine the hypothesis, in both its conceptual and empirical dimensions, in the light of my findings in the following areas of the investigation:

- Reception theory.
- Reader response criticism.
- OBE curricula and the competency debate.
- Responses of teachers to the questionnaires.
- Responses of teachers and in-service teacher trainers by means of group and individual interviews.

\(^3\) Highlighting techniques used in this chapter are not fully consistent with those used previously.
In presenting my findings, I propose to deal with the conceptual problem first, referring to the three premises that underpin the conceptual aspect of the hypothesis. The empirical problem is considered after this. Through this process I consider the extent to which the main arguments of this thesis are vindicated or not vindicated by my engagements with the above-mentioned investigations.

8.2 Findings

8.2.1 The conceptual dimension or problem:

Whether there is an inherent tension between a response-based approach to teaching imaginative literature, on the one hand, and compliance with the demands of an outcomes-based system of education, on the other.

The three premises, and their implications, underpinning the conceptual problem are:

**Premise one:**
The background, identity and experience of individual readers can play a significant part in shaping how they interpret and respond to what they read. It is therefore inappropriate to pre-determine generic outcomes in terms of imaginative engagements with texts, given the idiosyncratic nature of response.

**Premise two:**
A reader’s responding to literature involves inner, mental and emotional processing that includes elements such as the imagination, life orientation, prior experience and personality. Such processing cannot therefore be equated with tangible properties that can be assessed in terms of demonstrated performance.

**Premise three:**
The experience of responding to imaginative texts is a cumulative, ongoing process of interaction between reader and text. This implies that response needs time in which to grow, and that pinpointing points of commencement and closure
in response for the purposes of assessment would be arbitrary and would fragment response into discrete units of learning competence.

The main body of reception theory explored in this thesis supports the notion that personal response lies at the heart of the reader’s engagement with imaginative literature. The psychoanalytic theories of Holland and Bleich, for example (see sub-section 2.3.4), emphasise the personality structure of an individual reader as a determining influence in shaping response, while Rosenblatt (see sub-section 2.3.3) attaches importance to the aesthetic experience of the reader in transactions with text. In Iser’s view (see sub-section 2.2.4), shared by many others, reading is a creative process in which the imagination of the reader enters into a dynamic relationship with texts. This indicates an active role for the reader, a view common to reception theorists and reader response critics, although they may differ about the exact extent of the reader’s role. The complexity of mental and emotional processing during reading, shaped by the personal schemata (see sub-section 2.3.1) of individual readers, gives a unique, personal nature to response, and this underlies premise one of this thesis.

A further aspect of response that is described by reception theorists and reader response critics, and that has a direct bearing on this investigation is its ‘unfathomability’, its not being accessible to ready scrutiny. This feature of response, which underpins premise two of the thesis, means that it is not easy to gauge or to demonstrate in any precise manner. Hence, trying to produce ‘evidence’ that a reader has responded in a particular manner is a futile exercise, at best, and yet one that might be forced into an ill-fitting ‘harness’ in order to satisfy OBE requirements.

A related issue is where the meaning of a text is located. New Critical thought, as exemplified by Wellek and Warren (see sub-section 2.2.2), upheld the idea of a work of art, and the meaning it embodies, as being independent of the reader’s perception of it. Reception theory and reader response criticism represent a
major shift away from this stance towards a position where the reader plays a significant contributory role in realising the meanings of texts. Consequently, the less generic, and the more idiosyncratic the response of the individual reader (as posited in *premise one*), the less feasible it becomes to plan pre-formulated, generic outcomes and produce the kinds of ‘evidence’ required in the assessment of pre-specified outcomes in an OBE system.

In reader response pedagogy, the filling in of ‘gaps in the text’ is also an important role that can be played by the reader (see sub-section 2.2.4). The notion that text is ‘inexhaustible’ is linked to this concept, and also to what constitutes *premise one* of this thesis — that readers’ responses are unique, idiosyncratic and unpredictable because of personal schemata that come into play during their interactions with text. No two sets of schemata can be identical; hence no two responses can be the same, nor can they be predicted, unless in relation to the kinds of texts or reading purposes where literal meanings of the “efferent” kind are being pursued.

Another major point of emphasis in reader response and reception theory is the combination of intellectual, emotional and other faculties involved in the process of response. Rosenblatt, Protherough, Meek and others have much to say about this (see sub-sections 2.2.1 and 3.2.1). In chapter four of this thesis, attention is focused on the very light weighting given to affective engagements in the reading sections of the OBE curricula in South Africa. This could suggest that the dimension of feeling is relatively unimportant in overall reading practice, or that this dimension is difficult to accommodate in a system that prizes demonstrations of competence in relation to pre-planned tasks. The assessment of competence in the form of discrete tasks is at odds with a holistic notion of learning, and of learners as whole people whose engagements with literary texts comprise both intellect and feeling.
A focus in C2005 and its successor on competence in outcomes-based learning is inimical to the view of reading (or other kinds of learning) as a *process*. What Protherough, Rosenblatt, Probst and others say about reading can only be seen in terms of *process*, and certainly not as any kind of quantifiable *product* (see sub-sections 2.2.4, 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 and section 3.5). Process implies a complex set of happenings that are not easy to pinpoint. When the very complex personal, social and cultural schemata of individual readers come into play, the process of responding to creative texts becomes extremely difficult to predict, describe or assess, as stated in premise one. No teacher can hope to establish the real impact or significance that a particular text has on a particular individual. Even if the reader verbalises his or her response at a specific point, such verbalisation is already at one remove from what the reader actually experiences during reading. The words used to express thoughts and feelings may not come very close to capturing such an intensely personal, essentially private and inaccessible event. The elusive nature of the process, the basis of premise two, hence also refers to the reader’s own ability to access personal response, and not merely to the ability of other people, for example teachers, to do so. Children also differ in their ability to articulate their experiences; indeed, they may feel unwilling to express themselves, or may have different kinds of incentives to do so, as pointed out during one of the individual interviews with a local teacher. The meeting of specified assessment standards for particular reading activities may therefore be a superficial exercise that glosses over what really happens in terms of authentic reading experiences.

Closely linked to the notion of reading as a process is that of *response as an ongoing, developmental occurrence*. This is articulated in premise three, but is perhaps best expressed in the words of Michael Benton, who says that “responses need time and space in which to grow” (1988:202). In literature study, one has never finished with a particular poem or story; the process is always open-ended. C2005 and the NCS do include discussion and expression of opinion in their sections on reading. However, not only are these overshadowed...
by more knowledge-based aspects of reading, but there is virtually nothing to show how educators are expected to assess open-ended responses. What Iser, Jauss and others illuminate about the reading process in terms of personal schemata and horizons of expectations (see sub-sections 2.3.1 and 2.3.2), serve to highlight the complex and ongoing nature of response. C2005 defines outcomes as culminating achievements, which further distances the curriculum from truly engaging with reading as a process.

**Personal growth** is really what response-based literature teaching and learning are aimed towards. This aim incorporates much of what has been mentioned here in terms of readers as whole people who respond with both thought and feeling, of readers being unique individuals who play a creative role in realising the meanings of literary texts, and of response being dynamic, evolving, private and formative. It is therefore difficult to see how growth through reading can be made predictable in the sense that particular outcomes may be specified for specific reading activities in pedagogical contexts. It is even more difficult to see how such activities can be gauged in the terms set out by OBE curricula. When the achievement of pre-specified outcomes requires a tangible manifestation, the very credibility of such a system must be called into question.

In their responses to C2005 (see sections 4.1 and 4.6), Jansen and Kraak (1999) argue that what is potentially a progressive curriculum, given the political backdrop against which it appears, is significantly influenced by a behaviourist notion of assessing competence. While it would be an over-simplification to characterise C2005 or OBE as a product of behaviourism, it nevertheless reflects a preoccupation with performances that demonstrate the attainment of planned learning outcomes. This makes it difficult for C2005 to accommodate response-based approaches to literature study. It is not only the assessment methodology of C2005 that contains behaviouristic overtones, however. The concept of a learning outcome in Spadian terms leaves little room for learning processes that cannot readily be demonstrated. These difficulties arise from the problems
identified in premises one and two of the thesis. Spady (1994) defines outcomes as performances, demonstrations of competence, what learners can do as a result of their learning experiences (see section 4.3). Knowledge and insight are not regarded as outcomes; only demonstrations of what learners can do with what they know or understand, are outcomes, says Spady. Where C2005 fails response-based literature teaching is in making competence the cornerstone of achievement, and in not accommodating the nuances and longer-term processes of learning (referred to in premise three) anywhere within its structure.

C2005 is ambiguous in its attitude towards embracing values and attitudes as important outcomes of learning. While it may be argued that an attitude or value may be demonstrated, thereby meeting the requirements for an outcome, this would amount to a very limited vision of what are essentially inner qualities or processes. Like response to literature, values and attitudes need space to grow and develop. Pressure on teachers to ‘tick off’ a list of values and attitudes ‘developed’ in response to particular learning activities may induce them into accepting superficial demonstrations of attitude instead of the real thing. In the context of responding to literature, this kind of activity would fall far short of reaching any worthwhile goals. There is an added dimension, however, to the possibility of teachers engaging superficially with intangible processes such as the growth of attitudes and values. In the context of readers responding aesthetically to texts, some teachers may be unconscious of any incompatibility between spontaneous explorations of personal response, and curricular demands that outcomes be pre-determined and that they be assessed in terms of demonstrated competence (essential concerns of premises one and two). Conscientious strivings to comply with the injunctions of C2005 may cause teachers, unwittingly, to reduce what should be a creative process aimed towards personal growth, to the instrumental function of delivering a pre-determined product of learning.
The assessment standards of the revised NCS, which replace the former assessment criteria and specific outcomes, are still geared towards delivering outcomes in the same sort of way – through demonstrations of what learners will be able to do in specific areas of competence. From a user point of view, the revised curriculum is more convenient to work with, but the assessment standards have been criticised, inter alia, by SAIDE (see section 4.6), for working against a holistic view of learning. No improvement has been made in terms of assessment criteria or standards fragmenting knowledge into discrete testable units. This is not good news for the kind of approach thought to be appropriate for response-based literature study.

As far as the content of the latest NCS document is concerned, the situation regarding literature and reader response is, if anything, more problematical than before. A detailed account of the assessment standards for LO 3 is given in chapter four (sections 4.7 and 4.9), in which it is revealed that despite the prominence given to “enjoyment” and “responding” in the description of the outcome itself, this is not reflected in the assessment standards. This, together with the lack of overall coherence in the progression of the assessment standards from grade to grade, creates a stark picture for the prospects of learners engaging with literary texts.

On balance, the curricula supporting OBE in South African schools appear to lean towards an instrumentalist view of education, one which stresses the need for equipping future citizens with the competencies they will need in order to function effectively in a modern democratic society.

It may be a mistake to think that curriculum innovation will play a decisive role in addressing some of the urgent needs facing the country’s youth at present. Curricula can go so far in creating opportunities, but these need to be taken by real people who have the competence and the commitment to make the most of them. I suggested at the end of chapter six that there is a danger inherent in
setting one’s sights on medium-term goals such as ‘fixing’ what needs to be fixed in terms of teacher capacity, but stopping short of looking critically at some of the fundamental conceptual issues of curriculum design. Of these issues, that of accommodating response-based literature teaching and learning within an OBE system remains unresolved, and perhaps even unrecognised.

8.2.2 The empirical dimension or problem

I wish to preface my conclusions about the empirical process with two general comments. Firstly, my expectation that the holding of interviews with respondents would be the best means of encouraging open, detailed and spontaneous reflection proved to be well founded. Secondly, my decision not to risk leading my respondents to think in a particular direction prior to their responding to the questionnaires or participating in interviews was vindicated. While some of their responses could be interpreted as ‘unhelpful’ in terms of the problem being investigated, they did reflect the thinking of the respondents in relation to their own contexts.

5 Teachers’ responses to the questionnaire

My interaction with teachers of literature led to one very broad conclusion – that conceptual issues are unlikely to be at the forefront of their attention in the presence of more pressing concerns. Examining the responses of teachers to the questionnaires, for example, revealed the importance of making a clear distinction between what was a conceptual issue and what could be regarded more as a logistical matter. Many of the teachers referred to the added burden of paperwork that came with OBE, mostly in regard to recording the assessment activities. This perspective was communicated in responses to the questionnaire as well as in the course of the interviews.
In chapter one (sub-section 1.4.4) I point out that some teachers might, through lack of reflection or as a result of environmental pressures, **not be conscious of any incompatibility between response-based teaching and OBE**. This would have an influence on the extent to which they might experience any tension between curricular requirements and preferred classroom practice. In their responses, many of the participating teachers were indeed not explicit about their **awareness of concepts** or issues such as the unique nature of individual response and the inappropriateness of finding evidence of responses to match pre-selected outcomes. It even seemed likely that a few of the teachers did not perceive any incompatibility between personal response and pre-determined generic outcomes. Most if not all, however, showed a commitment to discussion, reflection and other processes that favour the exploration of personal responses, personal growth and the imagination.

Responses to the **teaching priorities rating scale** in the questionnaire revealed that most if not all teachers attached importance to a balance between imaginative engagements and intellectually focused tasks. An important finding in this section of the questionnaire was that the giving of tangible evidence that the learner has achieved specified outcomes fared worse than almost all the other priority items. This is consistent with the high priority given to teaching and learning activities that promote personal responses, and tasks that facilitate meaningful engagements with imaginative texts. However, more than half the respondents ranked the item about giving tangible evidence in the top two categories. In the cases where respondents' choices that favour personal response are inconsistent with other choices they make, there is reason to suspect that such respondents are not really conscious of the conceptual implications of some of their choices.

In commenting on the **obstacles to preferred ways of teaching literature**, a few respondents wrote about having to adjust their teaching styles in ways that left them unhappy. **In no case was it purely a matter of pedagogical principle**, as
‘paperwork’ had a lot to do with the constraints that OBE imposed on them. On the other hand, one respondent said that having to present tangible evidence of specific factors being assessed was a major source of stress. Another found that she could not focus on authentic literature pursuits because of having to demonstrate certain outcomes that were not particularly relevant, but which had to be recorded on paper. Responses like this pinpoint not only difficulties with the conceptual basis of OBE, but also with the additional administrative burden that it brings. This indicates that for teachers who are experiencing the daily challenge of dealing with OBE in the real world, it is difficult to separate the conceptual from administrative or logistical issues. Because of this, it is unlikely that practising teachers will provide strong evidence to support the purely conceptual problem raised in this thesis.

Teachers’ responses to questions about assessment in the questionnaire suggest that many of them are unclear about exactly what role assessment should play in the teaching of literature in an OBE system. No one went so far as to say that assessment actually supported teaching and learning, but one or two were openly sceptical about its value. In attempting to draw conclusions from this, one should bear in mind, once again, that teachers’ points of view are likely to be influenced by pressures that the assessment requirements bring to bear. One or two may have come close to suggesting that OBE assessment procedures tended to undermine the holistic goals associated with reader response, but no one really analysed them in a conceptual manner. Time constraints, negative attitudes of some pupils and the volume of paperwork were among some of the telling comments about assessment. One cannot ignore the practicalities of everyday teaching when considering what teachers have to say about a potentially contentious issue such as assessment.

As with the questions about assessment, responses to the role and effect of outcomes in the planning and implementation of lessons drew a mixed set of responses. If this were plotted on a spectrum, at the one end would be a group
of teachers who reveal a positive outlook towards outcomes (although they admit
to having limited experience of OBE). Towards the middle are teachers who
experience frustration with outcomes because they (the outcomes) are vague or
out of touch with reality, while at the far end of the spectrum are teachers who
are either cynical about outcomes generating a “paper-chase”, or concerned
about the limiting effects it has on creativity and methodological flexibility.

Few of the teachers are indifferent towards OBE; some have a clearer focus on
OBE than others, but all have made some attempt to adjust their practice to accommodate it. Some teachers seem to be coping by glossing over or being selective regarding C2005 structures. Others see ‘paperwork’ as the only real problem. Several of the teachers, however, are encountering stress for both conceptual and logistical reasons. With hindsight, I was pleased that I had decided not to ‘prime’ the respondents with regard to the concepts at the centre of my research focus by revealing my hand, as it were, prior to their responding to the questionnaire. Apart from perhaps contributing to a greater level of candour on the part of respondents, it also allowed me an opportunity to gauge whether any of the teachers are unaware of certain implications of their practice, such as encouraging (or thinking they are encouraging) reader response while at the same time trying to comply closely with OBE procedures. Teachers who offer potentially contradictory responses may be unaware of any conflict between one set of conceptual principles and another, in which case they would be unlikely to experience any tension in their own practice.

As happened in the responses to assessment issues, few respondents got down to seriously questioning the conceptual validity of outcomes in relation to literature teaching. Nevertheless, some of them testified to the experience of outcomes taking them in one direction and the lesson in quite another. This in itself is a cause for questioning the place of outcomes in literature teaching, particularly when they are described by some as trite, vague, or out of touch with reality. In the end, one may conclude that outcomes, although not condemned
out of hand as being illegitimate in the context of response-based teaching, are a
source of some turbulence, if not outright stress in all cases. As happened in the
case of assessment procedures, the curricular demand to teach towards
outcomes has exacted its toll in terms of unprecedented pressure on teachers to
bring a far more constrained and demanding level of planning to what they do in
the classroom. It is difficult not to infer that many of the respondents experience
C2005 as an artificial structure that has been imposed on them, severely
constraining them from what they want to be free to do: to facilitate their pupils’
responding creatively to encounters with texts. This does not bode well for the
kinds of processes to which most of the teachers attached premium value.

6 Group interview with primary school teachers

The group interview with the five teachers from a primary school was intended to
shed more light on mainly two key aspects that had been responded to in the
questionnaire – outcomes and assessment. Comments about outcomes tended
to be fairly bland, because there was a feeling that the specific outcomes of
C2005 were so vague (or broad) that they could be made to fit in with whatever
teachers happened to be doing. In a sense, outcomes were not being confronted
head-on, but were being neutralised, as it were, by not being allowed to dictate
any strong direction that might conflict with what teachers wanted or needed to
do. One teacher mentioned that she often ticked off the applicable outcomes
after having given her lesson. Only one of the teachers was really positive about
OBE, while the rest were non-committal, covertly cynical or not particularly
bothered. My conclusion about this finding is that OBE, if not taken on board in a
whole-hearted fashion, can be ‘worked around’, as a skilled batsman might do to
an artful bowler of spin on the cricket field. It is perhaps a feasible alternative to
declaring war on the opposition, which could result in the teacher being ‘trapped’
well out of his or her ground. As a coping device, pragmatic strategies appear to
be a feasible solution if the ‘nuisance value’ is to be taken out of outcomes.
A common theme to emerge from this group was that literature was not ‘taught as such’, and that reading of fiction (or poetry) was but one facet of a much wider reading programme that included texts suitable for “efferent” use. To some extent then, there was not as much at stake for reader response as could have been the case had it occupied a large segment of the English curriculum. Teachers pointed out that having to teach several (or all eight) learning areas obliged them to juggle around with English in the interests of maintaining a fair balance between learning areas in the curriculum. This has the effect that English, being the language of teaching and learning, is frequently used to ‘service’ other areas of the curriculum.

Responses to the separate instrument on assessment reveal that none of the respondents raised any serious issues about linking assessment to outcomes, but all felt that assessment of less tangible aspects of reader response should not be neglected simply because they were more difficult to assess. This attitude alone provides some vindication of the argument in this thesis that the process of response is not something that can be gauged in a quantifiable manner as might be appropriate for more “efferent” purposes in reading.

7 Group interview with teacher trainers

The overall impression that I gained from my interview with the teacher trainers was that they were under two kinds of pressure with regard to their mission. The first pressure was time – time to complete the programme of workshops that had been planned in order to equip teachers to implement the next stage of C2005. The second pressure was more challenging, and probably more frustrating – that of motivating teachers who lacked a basic “reference field” in reading because of poor or limited exposure to books in their personal background – to involve themselves to the full in embracing the reading needs of children whose home language was not English.
It is understandable that the second problem is of such a nature that it can hamper the efforts of in-service teacher trainers in the carrying out of their primary task – that of supporting teachers methodologically in implementing OBE in their classrooms. It would hence be reasonable to conclude that this is an area that requires creative thinking on the part of all concerned in both in-service and pre-service teacher training.

With regard to reading, the teacher trainers confirmed the impression I first gained during the earlier group interview with the teachers, i.e. that the intensive reading of literary texts is not the focus of special attention in the primary school. Reading forms part of a much wider programme that targets a range of skills associated with “efferent” texts across the learning programmes. One should not conclude from this that reading for enjoyment is unimportant, or that reading is perceived largely from an instrumentalist point of view, but it does place the kind of reading that is the concern of this thesis into perspective. Respondents in this interview did not think that “aesthetic” reading was under-represented in either C2005 or the NCS. In their view it was up to the teacher to do creative things with their pupils, but because many teachers have a poor “reference field”, limitations in this area of reading have more to do with the teachers than with limitations in the curriculum. In other words, these teacher trainers assert that the curriculum itself is not to blame for imaginative engagements with texts not receiving due attention. I cannot fully agree with this, as an overwhelming preponderance of reading skills and pursuits of the “efferent” kind in the curriculum does say something about where curriculum planners place their priorities in reading.

The preoccupation of teacher trainers with the task, as they see it, of uplifting teachers in terms of their own general competence proved an obstacle to getting to the heart of some of the conceptual issues. It can be understood that empowering teachers to cope with reading across the curriculum would be given greater priority than equipping them to deal sensitively with pupils’ responses to literary texts. Unfortunately however, this situation could lead to teachers, teacher
trainers and all directly and indirectly involved in language teaching being beguiled into accepting an instrumental view of reading as being appropriate for the present time. The closest that the respondents in this interview came to focusing on issues such as the idiosyncratic nature of personal response – the concern of premise one – was when they stressed the need for teachers to know the cultural and linguistic background of individual learners. This principle hence acquires a special status in the context of country that is very far away from having anything like a homogeneous reading community.

The conceptual difficulty I identify in premise two, that of assessing essentially inaccessible and private reading processes by requiring learners to demonstrate competence, is not one with which practitioners readily engage, given the kinds of demands made on their time. This became clear when one trainer spoke of a receptive skill (reading) being assessed through the exercise of a productive skill (what the learner can do, for example, in writing). I did not find that either this, or the strategy of providing teachers with long lists of “possible products for assessment” came close to addressing the problem of conceptual incompatibility between aesthetic reading processes and instrumental views of assessment. Moreover, “products for assessment” suggest the fragmentation of reading processes into arbitrary and measurable units, which flies in the face of premise three, which is concerned with the longer-term nature of response. A more pressing demand for the trainers was to equip teachers to identify relevant assessment criteria to be matched with specified outcomes, rather than to get them to reflect about whether assessment criteria were the appropriate tools for assessment of reading in the first place.

The same constraints apply to the implications of premise one of this thesis: given the uniqueness of individual readers’ responses, formulating outcomes in advance for reading activities is a flawed principle. The conceptual problems associated with this are not seen by the teacher educators to be as important as
the need to empower teachers to make their own choices within the parameters of the curriculum structure.

8 Individual interviews with teachers

My first conclusion in regard to the individual interviews is that they did, as anticipated, offer the best means of engaging meaningfully with teachers about key matters being explored in this thesis. This is so despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that we did not necessarily adhere to a set sequence of questions designed to ensure that all ‘bases’ were covered.

So it emerged that there were differences in the amount of time each spent on teaching literature, and there were differing amounts of emphasis that each placed on response-based learning activities. However, the interviews made it possible to establish that all four teachers encourage learners to explore their personal responses to texts, and all of them attach importance to the uniqueness of each learner’s response, hence endorsing premise one underlying the conceptual problem in question. None of the teachers, however, gave much evidence that they engage closely with the complex nature of reader response, which is not surprising in the light of the demands placed on them in their daily work.

All respondents reported that transparency with regard to lesson outcomes was important and generated a favourable response from the pupils. This could throw light on the usefulness of outcomes in helping learners to focus on where they are going and how they are progressing, but it does not indicate that reader response activities are necessarily well served by outcomes. The fact that outcomes appear to be endorsed by the pupils with regard to language learning in general, or by some teachers who are intent on producing outcomes in order to ‘make OBE work’, does not mean that outcomes must be seen as an appropriate strategy for encouraging reading response.
The teachers’ comments about assessment of response-based activities indicate that this is an area fraught with difficulties. What is interesting is that these difficulties are not only associated with practical considerations such as large numbers of pupils in each class. This is certainly a significant factor, but at least three of the four teachers raised conceptual difficulties as well, chiefly that a reader’s appreciation and enjoyment cannot and therefore should not be assessed (it can be informally assessed through discussion and so on), and that it is troubling to have to fragment response into discrete little portions to be assessed for demonstrations of certain kinds of competence. Other factors that appear to affect attitudes towards assessment include learner motivation and, predictably, the capacity of teachers to cope with the complex assessment procedures required in C2005.

A crucial question to be addressed was the relevance of planning literature lessons in accordance with pre-selected outcomes. Perhaps one may generalise on the basis of the teachers’ responses here: they give high priority to defending open-ended debate in the literature classroom, giving preference to an answer rather than to the (correct) answer. On the other hand, how teachers deal with the need to deliver pre-specified outcomes and assess them in relation to an area as sensitive and open-ended as response, is unpredictable. The more that a teacher is guided by instinct in his or her teaching, the more of a problem this is likely to be, and the greater the tension that will result. At least two if not three of the respondents in these interviews exemplify this situation: although one of them seems able to ‘ignore’ certain constraints, another would favour the direction taken by the lesson if it deviated from what was planned, while a third would, reluctantly, bring the lesson back in line with the planned outcome if necessary. One may conclude that how a teacher deals with tensions like these depends on matters such as experience, confidence, freedom to act autonomously within the school structure, personality, motivation to teach in a logically coherent manner,
language and reading background, the ‘culture’ or ethos of the school and, doubtless, several other factors too.

One aspect of literature in the classroom about which there was clear unanimity was the importance of learners’ feelings when they engage with texts. This bears out the responses of the teachers to the questionnaires and it does send out a message that this element of response is non-negotiable in any possible ‘spin-offs’ between what the teacher wishes, by preference, custom, or instinct, to do in the literature classroom and what is demanded by the OBE curriculum.

Finally, these interviews showed that teachers do not operate in a vacuum, no matter how strongly motivated they are, or how sound their own educational and reading background. Three of the four teachers made explicit references to the school climate in which they were working. Schools that require strict adherence to the curriculum can affect teachers either negatively or positively: negatively if the teacher is a ‘free spirit’ and an independent thinker, or positively if the teacher needs support – provided, of course, that the school is prepared to offer that. An incoherent, dysfunctional or unsupportive school policy towards curriculum implementation can offer little positive effect. An indifferent or tentative approach to curriculum in a school environment that is otherwise functional can leave some teachers with the freedom to do what suits them best. For many teachers, however, the scope that C2005 offers for teachers to use their own initiative is a freedom they may prefer not to have.

8.3 The way forward?

In order to make genuine provision for reader response as a core activity in the reading programme, curriculum designers need to reflect on the nature and significance of the processes involved in imaginative engagements with literary texts. The curriculum should adopt a clear stance about the place and the importance of aesthetic purposes in reading and spell this out in greater detail. It
is vital that those who apply the curriculum in the classroom be given the message that “efferent” reading purposes and texts have their place, but that they should not be allowed to overshadow aesthetic reading pursuits in the interests of fostering all-round reading competence across the curriculum.

In all three of the curriculum statements on language in the Intermediate and Senior Phases, namely Home, First Additional and Second Additional Language, significant additions and adjustments need to be made in order to address the problem outlined in the previous paragraph.

This should be done in two ways. Firstly, the assessment standards must be extended in order to include sufficient references to enjoyment and to aesthetic and emotional response. The latter are very much part of the overarching learning outcome for reading and viewing, yet the assessment standards do not reflect this. There is no reason why they should not also include evidence (as opposed to demonstration) that learners have engaged at an emotional level with literary texts: that they can show empathy; that they can respond to ethical issues; that they can express authentic responses such as joy, sadness, indignation, excitement. There is no reason why assessment standards cannot ask for indications that learners bring to texts their own perspectives born from personal experience, memories, associations and contexts, and that they show the ability to give their own unique shape to their encounters with texts.

Secondly, the official policy on learner assessment needs to be revised in such a way as to spell out that not everything in literature study – or in other aspects of language work – needs to be assessed in a formally acknowledged manner. The policy documents for the latest curriculum contain whole sections on assessment that address the purposes and processes of assessment. They deal with the need for transparency, predetermined criteria, validity and reliability. They spell out aspects such as baseline, diagnostic, formative, summative and systemic assessment, but do not make any reference to the role of judgement on the part
of the teacher, nor to the possibility that the discretion of the teacher may have a role to play in regard to the quality of readers’ interactions with texts.

Both the sections containing the assessment standards for particular learning outcomes as well as the dedicated sections on assessment of learners should contain material that ‘humanises’ response to literary texts and that shows clearly how learning outcomes can be achieved in a variety of ways, and not only through demonstrations of competence of one kind or another.

The next step would be to find ways of encouraging the teachers themselves to reflect critically on their practice. Even if many teachers have an inadequate reading background, they should be given intense exposure to a variety of suitable texts for aesthetic reading purposes, and, importantly, should also be encouraged to engage personally with such texts as a prerequisite for being able to facilitate the same process in their own classrooms.

A different approach to in-service training would be indicated: one that follows a more developmental approach and which incorporates a substantial element of follow-up through classroom monitoring and support. In order for such an approach to be realised, however, the human resources capacity of the Department of Education would have to be boosted substantially in the area of in-service training. An additional benefit that could accrue from a more sustained in-service teacher-training strategy should be an improvement in teachers’ general proficiency in English, the language of teaching and learning in most South African schools. This would be of the greatest importance in the enhancement of their all-round effectiveness across the curriculum.

Where teachers do not reflect critically on the teaching of literature for reasons other than an inadequate background or poor resources, one needs to identify other causes. They could range from teacher apathy or lack of insight into the nature of reading processes, to logistical considerations associated with class
numbers and the extent of the burden that OBE planning and assessment impose on teachers. When the last-mentioned factors are added to the problem of inadequate teacher background and preparation, the challenges facing attempts to foster a culture of reading for aesthetic enjoyment and personal growth seem formidable. Nevertheless, the importance of fostering such a reading culture ought not to be overlooked or ‘put on hold’ until supposedly more urgent needs have been addressed.

Educational authorities cannot afford to lose sight of the fact that teachers are human beings who have (or should have) personal views and preferences when it comes to how they go about their task in the classroom. This is especially so in the context of potentially open-ended teaching and learning processes. To expect unquestioning compliance on the part of teachers with all C2005 injunctions is to attempt to force all types of teachers into the same type of teaching ‘harness’. Moreover, when that harness is ill conceived in respect of learning processes such as reader response, the potential for undermining the evolution of a genuine reading culture among both teachers and pupils can only be heightened.

If many more teachers are empowered, in the true sense of the word, to take responsibility for what they teach and how they teach, a greater proportion of the teaching corps may become part of the critical debate about conceptually challenging issues in curriculum content and methodology. For the health of their profession, teachers need to adopt a more critical stance towards some of the assumptions underpinning what they are expected to do.

8.4 A few recommendations for further research

The incompatibility between response-based literature teaching and essential features of the OBE system practised in South Africa has been explored both conceptually and empirically in this thesis. It is concluded that there are grounds for concern about both the theoretical assumptions underpinning OBE curricula,
and possible effects that they may have in the classroom. There are many teachers who are likely to be affected by a conceptual mismatch between two very different kinds of processes, but there are many more pupils who could be denied the opportunity to embark upon enriching learning experiences that would foster personal growth. There are a number of issues that could, through further research, help to take forward the debate raised in this thesis. A few possibilities are listed below.

Empirical studies of learners’ engagements with specific literary texts would contribute to greater understanding of aesthetic reading processes, and of their importance in the curriculum. This could be done by means of action research, a process that might be of particular relevance to a team research project.

Case studies of particular teachers teaching specific literary works would provide opportunities for many of the issues raised in this thesis to be explored further. This could have positive consequences for the teachers concerned, as their participation in such a research project would inevitably mean that they would be encouraged to reflect on whatever conceptual issues were being explored.

Investigations of the kinds of methodologies best suited to response-based literature teaching could generate a variety of perspectives for the consideration of all concerned with teaching and teacher training in the field of English. Such investigations could be based on comparisons and could involve both shorter-term and longitudinal studies.

Comparative studies with regard to intensive and extensive reading responses would contribute to a better understanding of the different kinds of reading purposes in the classroom. This could not only assist the teacher in making appropriate selections of texts, where this is feasible, but could also create greater awareness of the kinds of processes involved when readers engage very closely with a particular text or when covering a wider area.
Research could be undertaken into response to particular genres of literature, such as fiction, poetry and drama. In the case of drama, various interrelated dimensions of response could be explored. Examples of this could be the performer’s response to that of the audience, which is in turn influenced by that of the performer to the script, to the interactions on stage and to the audience itself. There could be investigations of the dynamic interactions with text that Iser (1978) refers to, from the point of view of both the audience and the performer. Comparisons could be made between reception of a play as a reading text, as a script for performance, and as a physical enactment on the stage. Moreover, response to drama could relate to all three premises of this thesis. No two readers or members of an audience will receive a text, script or performance in quite the same way, and no two actors would interpret a script in an identical fashion (premise one). Response to drama could be ongoing, with the response to one reading, viewing or performance impacting on that of another (premise three). Premise two, however, could be affected by the dimension of *performance* which is, in a sense, a tangible manifestation of response, and not as ‘private’ as in the case of other genres. Furthermore, the combination of intellectual and emotional response, referred to by both reception theorists and reader response critics in terms of how whole people relate to aesthetic texts, could be explored in drama. Shakespeare himself articulated this through the blinded Gloucester’s growth in spiritual vision in *King Lear* (1V: vi: 145), when he declared, “I see it feelingly”.

Finally, a research project involving several English teachers on the same teaching staff could create the opportunity for establishing a culture of action research at the school. More importantly, perhaps, it could provide the basis for mutual support and a sharing of insights regarding experiences in the classroom. Ultimately, such projects should be aimed at forging creative links between schools and teacher-training institutions, links that would encourage and support
the practice of reflecting critically and responsibly on choices made and actions taken in the literature classroom.
Dear English Teacher

I would greatly appreciate your willingness to provide some personal feedback on a few selected issues in the teaching of literature (prose fiction in English). The purpose of this is to establish a starting point for investigating the views and practices of teachers in our local region. My research project will explore the compatibility between the outcomes / assessment standards for reading activities in the languages learning area of the OBE curriculum, and classroom teaching approaches that attach importance to the role of the reader.

Please respond to the following questions about yourself and your work with as much accuracy as possible. It would be advisable to read through all of the items beforehand so as to avoid possible overlapping in your responses.

(Note: this response sheet is being distributed to a limited number of respondents and will not be used for any kind of statistical analysis.)

1 Basic information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your name:</th>
<th>Name of school (optional)</th>
<th>School level of readiness &amp; resources for implementing OBE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>1 = extremely poor; 2 = poor; 3 = adequate; 4 = more than adequate; 5 = excellent</td>
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<td>Contact number(s):</td>
<td>No. of years language teaching experience:</td>
<td>Grades you teach or have taught in the past (please tick in relevant blocks below):</td>
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<td>Post occupied:</td>
<td>No. of years experience with OBE curriculum:</td>
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<td>4 5 6 7 8 9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2 Using a scale of 1-5 (1 = lowest and 5 = highest value), indicate how important the following aspects of teaching and learning fiction are to you. Place a tick in the relevant block. Add further items if necessary.
Readers do the following:

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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Comprehend the overall structure of the story / be able to summarise events effectively.</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>Understand and recall events or important factual details accurately.</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>Make inferences about ideas, situations, vocabulary or syntax from the context of the story.</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>Make links between the situation, characters, etc. of story and their own life experience / world.</td>
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<td>E</td>
<td>Describe their own responses to characters and events through work sheet, free writing, etc.</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Predict future events, dialogue, attitudes of characters, or endings of stories.</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>Demonstrate knowledge about elements of story such as plot, theme, characters, point of view.</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>Change text to another form / adapt for performance eg. drama script, courtroom debate.</td>
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<td>Use text as springboard for other language work, eg grammar, writing conventions, report etc.</td>
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<td>J</td>
<td>Give tangible evidence of having achieved specified outcomes through structured assessment.</td>
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<td>K</td>
<td>Reflect on the way they react to the text, what influenced their response, stance, etc.</td>
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<td>L</td>
<td>Participate actively in exploring / negotiating meaning, discussing, writing about story.</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Develop literary awareness / discrimination about what is 'quality' and 'non-quality' reading.</td>
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<td>Exercise their imaginations / creativity when engaging with characters and events in stories.</td>
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<td>Grow in self-knowledge through relating to themes, characters and contexts of stories.</td>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>Develop communication skills in small and whole group situations.</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>Expand and improve their vocabulary for both literary and everyday contexts.</td>
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3 Did you find that completing the rating scale was helpful or limiting in giving an accurate indication of your priorities in teaching fiction? Please motivate briefly.

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4 Have you, in practice, been able to give effect to your preferred way of teaching fiction, or have you encountered significant obstacles to doing so in the day-to-
day realities of classroom teaching, through Curriculum 2005 restrictions or other factors? Please elaborate.

5A What is your attitude to the use of worksheets for teaching and assessment purposes?

5B Do you make use of published worksheets (eg in commercially available workbooks)? If so, what is the advantage of doing this? (Bear in mind how you responded to the rating scale.) Do you also prepare your own worksheets where possible?

6 Assessment:

6A Presently, is the study of fiction subject to both formal / summative AND continuous / formative assessment? If so, what weighting is given to each form of assessment?

6B In your experience of teaching fiction, do assessment practices (worksheets, tests, exams, etc.) perform a supportive role that allows them to form an integral part of the learning process? Please elaborate.

7 OBE and Curriculum 2005

7A What do you understand by the term outcome?
7B Do you find that teaching towards the achievement of specified outcomes helps you to focus more clearly on your rationale for and planning of teaching and learning units / learning activities? How?

7C By and large, do the outcomes specified for particular lessons / teaching and learning activities actually play an important and helpful role during these activities? Why? (Read question 7D before answering.)

7D Do you (sometimes) feel that the specific outcomes for LLC or even outcomes identified for particular lesson activities somehow fail to capture what you would like to see happening in the classroom? The solution?

7E In the context of OBE / Curriculum 2005, do you have any additional comments to make about assessment procedures?
Teacher / learner input

8A Would you say that teacher input plays a dominant role in your classroom, or do your learners have plenty of scope to make inputs of their own?

8B Is the teacher / learner input ratio in accordance with what you are comfortable with, or is it affected by practical constraints?

Thank you for making the effort to respond to this.
## APPENDIX 2

### RESULTS OF PRIORITY RATINGS PER ITEM (QUESTIONNAIRE)

2. Using a scale of 1-5 (1 = lowest and 5 = highest value), indicate how important the following aspects of teaching and learning fiction are to you. Place a tick in the relevant block. Add further items if necessary.

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<td>R Expand and improve their vocabulary for both literary and everyday contexts.</td>
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APPENDIX 3
TEACHERS’ INTERPRETATIONS OF OUTCOMES (QUESTIONNAIRE)

1. I see it as a long-term objective / aim. A goal we are striving to achieve with learners over a period of time. Skills we want them to have picked up / mastered by the time they’re done.

2. A skill the learner must be able to do / perform.

3. Skill that the learner should be able to demonstrate.

4. What skill you wish the child to attain (result).

5. The outcome would be that the learner has successfully acquired / adhered to the criteria set before the lesson began.

6. A specific objective which each learner should achieve.

7. The end result you wish to achieve and thus the methods you (the educator) will use in order for the learner to achieve that outcome.

8. A goal. Whether it be for an hour, day, week is irrelevant. To achieve an outcome, the child must be able to demonstrate some level of competency.

9. An outcome is what must be reached or attained before the next section / part / learning area is tackled.

10. What you would like the learner to achieve and / or what the learner gains from the particular task. The learner will be able to acquire skills, knowledge, attitudes and values / insight – that which will be of value now and for life.

11. What the learners must have achieved at the end of the lesson or task.

12. What must be achieved at the end of the lesson / section of work / task / activity / etc.

13. Knowing what you want to see the learner able to do, demonstrate; outcome is lodged in an action / verb.

14. The thing you have to tick on a sheet and have proof that the learner can do even though it is a concept you know the learner is capable of without formal methods of proving it.

15. A demonstrable performance of something pre-determined as a learning criterion.
APPENDIX 4

SELECTED COMMENTS BY TEACHERS USED IN THE GROUP INTERVIEW

1. SOs are so broad that you can fit them in anywhere / Many of the outcomes are so vague they can be applied to a wide range of activities.

2. But when working with 30 individuals it falls apart, mainly because you do not have time to accurately assess each one.

3. We are encouraged to experiment in Grade 5. We do not actually teach fiction.

4. With the pressure of teaching all learning areas, literature is often pushed aside to make way for ‘more important’ work.

5. It does help to know what ‘end product’ you are aiming for, although with diverse classes, these outcomes often change according to the demands of the classroom.

6. It is more important to adapt according to the needs of your class than to remain rigid for the sake of marking off that a specific outcome has been achieved.

7. The lack of directives from the education department allowed me to explore my own agenda and to be more creative.

8. Assessment practices are not really supportive of the teaching and learning process; because of time restraints, most assessment has to be used for a mark-driven report.

9. Unfortunately what is planned in theory often goes out the window when put into practice, because there are so many problems encountered along the way…we land up at another end point.

10. With my having to teach every subject, time does not allow the recording of each individual’s outcomes.

11. Teaching towards specified outcomes: learners know where they are going and whether or not they have arrived…more dynamic…learners seem to be more motivated…responsible…actively involved…helps tremendously with differentiation, helping all to achieve some success.

12. Pupils enjoy discussing a book, but don’t enjoy writing too much about it. A short worksheet is fine…
13. SOs fail to capture what you want to do...Yes, you are working with different minds...sometimes they latch onto a different aspect and then you have to adapt. (Not a problem.)

14. You often tend to lead the discussions, but encourage all learners to express their opinions, and reassure them that they are welcome to have different views to their peers as long as they can say why they feel that way.
APPENDIX 5
STATEMENTS ON ASSESSMENT IN LITERATURE STUDY

1. Literature, because it’s a meeting of reader and text, is a difficult subject to test.
   Agree | Strongly agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

2. If we could establish the one right reading of a work…then assessing the learning of literature would be easy.
   Agree | Strongly agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

3. There are, of course, aspects that can be accurately measured.
   Agree | Strongly agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

4. The problem is that the essential matters are not so easily tested.
   Agree | Strongly agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

5. Reasoning, response and reflection do not lend themselves readily to testing, so should therefore not be evaluated.
   Agree | Strongly agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

6. Teachers often compromise, testing what seems testable, and hoping for the best with the remainder. This is to be expected.
   Agree | Strongly agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

7. What is tested becomes the most important part of the curriculum, and what is not tested is neglected.
   Agree | Strongly agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

8. It is difficult to test, in any traditional sense, the students’ unique and changing interactions with the literature.
   Agree | Strongly agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree

9. Sometimes it is more important to test something comparatively insignificant than to teach something significant.
   Agree | Strongly agree | Disagree | Strongly disagree
APPENDIX 6

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP INTERVIEW WITH OBE TRAINING PERSONNEL

1. What level of readiness for teaching languages (Home, 1st additional, etc.) do you find among teachers who attend training workshops?

2. Where does the emphasis lie in terms of LO3 – Reading and Viewing – in the revised NCS? How does this compare with previous versions, and with C2005?

3. What do you associate with the term ‘reader response’, particularly in regard to imaginative works such as fiction?

4. Do you think teachers should be encouraged to accept a unique contribution that individual readers bring to their reading?

5. Could you identify two or three really important teaching and learning outcomes for reading in the Intermediate Phase?

6. What sorts of knowledge, values, competencies etc. do the assessment standards for LO3 Reading and Viewing appear to be targeting?

7. How does one measure the success of a child’s reading activity? Can this be done in any precise way? Should this be ‘tested’? How do you help the teachers with this?

8. How should teachers try to plan their outcomes for reading activities? How would you respond to the suggestion that planning outcomes for responding to fiction is largely irrelevant to what reading is really about?

9. Is there a fair balance between intellectual and emotional elements in the assessment standards / SOs / AC etc. when it comes to reading?

10. Is there any consistency about the way different schools, or different teachers at a particular school implement OBE?
APPENDIX 7

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS WITH INDIVIDUAL TEACHERS

1. In which grade do you teach English / literature / reading?

2. How much time does reading (fiction, particularly) take overall in English?

3. What do you associate with the term ‘reader response’?

4. How much value do you attach to reader response in the reading of fiction in the classroom? Do you normally give plenty of scope for this, and for children to use their imaginations in relation to their reading?

5. Would you agree that each reader brings a unique combination of experience, associations and memories to his or her reading / listening to fiction that gives a highly individual and unpredictable shape to his or her response? Do you believe that to some extent, a story cannot have exactly the same meaning or significance for two different readers?

6. Would you go along with the idea that much of what happens when children read goes on ‘inside their heads’ and cannot be ‘tested’ or ‘demonstrated’ in a tangible way?

7. Would you describe your approach towards reading in your grade as ‘learner-centred’ – one that encourages active engagement with reading texts on the part of the children?

8. How do you assess the learners’ achievements in reading and responding to what they read? Is it important for your readers to carry a certain amount of knowledge about story conventions, terms, etc.?

9. Is it possible to measure the success of a child’s reading activity in any precise way?

10. What aspects of C2005 are reflected in your day-to-day work in the field of English teaching, and literature in particular? E.g. specific outcomes, assessment criteria, performance indicators, or of the NCS, e.g. learning outcomes and assessment standards?

11. Is there any overall consistency on the staff of your school in terms of how C2005 is implemented in literature teaching?
12. How would you respond to the suggestion that planning to achieve certain outcomes when dealing with imaginative texts is a largely irrelevant pursuit, given the personal nature of an individual reader's response to a particular text?

13. What kind of balance do you think is appropriate between intellectual and emotional elements in readers' responses to fiction?

14. What impression have you gained of the learning outcomes relating to reading and viewing in C2005 / NCS? Do they reflect a fair balance in respect of cognitive and affective elements of response?

15. What are the most rewarding aspects of fiction reading activities in your classroom? Do you experience any frustrations that are linked in some way to the structures and requirements of OBE?
APPENDIX 8

TRANSCRIPT: INTERVIEW WITH N H (HIGH SCHOOL)

NH
I want to know whether you’re concerned with the child reading the book, the activity of the child, or with the teacher and the associated assessment?

CVR
I think both … I think what goes on in the child’s head is what makes a private, an ‘inaccessible thing’, but if it’s going to be part of what a teacher says is important, then it’s got to form part of the classroom activity. Then one might say that you don’t assess that kind of thing; just leave it. Or one might say, well, there are different ways of assessing.

NH
But you can’t actually assess that. You can assess comprehension, you can assess perhaps understanding of theme or whatever, but you cannot actually expect, I should imagine, without some sort of psychological equipment, the actual reading process, and I see no point to that unless you find a child has a reading problem. Certainly child interest must come into it. If a child is interested in soccer, a book about soccer would probably appeal more than a book about (indistinct).

CVR
How does one then accommodate reading in OBE, with assessment criteria …

NH
I suppose the logical thing is that the actual act of reading isn’t an outcome. The product of reading, which is not ideal.

CVR
My third premise is that reading isn’t something the outcome of which you can determine or see in the short term. How do you know – perhaps a second reading of a book might be different – he might be older. He might see something in the book he didn’t see the first time, even if you’re not older. Maybe sharing,
discussing it with someone else, and then re-reading it, sharing it with someone this time, or not sharing it with someone this time. Um, you know, so is there a cut-off point where you can say, right this is now where we can say this is what the effect of the book was, the story or the poem was on this person.

NH
What I tend to do when I’m teaching, is - I like kids to read at home – say we’re doing setwork, and I say read a chapter, or if we’re reading in class, say how do you feel about this now, give them a task to do that explores their very now feelings about what they’ve read, and then it’s perfectly okay to (indistinct)... It must be, otherwise you’re not giving the kids the freedom…often then I would have a discussion during an activity – something that involves thinking, working with it. And then they reassess what they said before. Often they change their minds then. But I am very mistrustful to attach an outcome to that. You know, something like, “the child must have changed her mind about the book’ would be ludicrous.

CVR
How about “must respond to the book”. Is that an outcome?

NH
It’s a response to an outcome! You know, if the child says (yuk), I think the book was “crap”, I think that’s okay, I would encourage the child to verbalise something a little more articulate!

CVR
Would you also encourage, or require the person to substantiate, even if you don’t agree with it.

NH
Sure, particularly when I don’t agree with them.

CVR
How do you attach an outcome to, at least a certain amount a competence with which a child expresses a point of view – it may not be a particularly informed point of view, but at least, is able to adopt a stance.
Imagine 35 kids. We’ve just finished reading poem x, book y, whatever. I find it very difficult to work out how I am to assess 35 children’s initial responses. Then they will do an activity I will probably have to assess as well, and then we do a follow-up. “How do you feel about it?” “Think about it”. “How do you feel about it now?” That’s three separate things I would have to assess and report for 35 children, or 35 times 3, or whatever. That’s a lot of writing, recording of information from something that’s actually quite instinctive.

From a teaching perspective it’s instinctive to me. So, my problem with outcomes is that as soon as you start to achieve an outcome out of an activity, while it can provide a lot of structure, that’s perhaps is rather necessary for teachers, especially when you’re starting up, it can just get in the way of a helpful, working method. Because you stop to have to think, and then inevitably have to report.

I remember your making a comment on the questionnaire – It’s stopping you from being the kind of teacher you want to be. Maybe this is the point you were making there.

To be honest, what I do is just make it up afterwards, but don’t tell anyone that! No, but okay, little Sally had this response…um, I think, and recording it as what is most likely based on my one piece of evidence…

You used the word evidence as well; you used the word instinct. Your instinct, you know, evidence, and the evidence can be construed in different ways, it can be in writing, it can be something you can see happening, being done, hear being said.

Use the tape deck, and shove it under the kids’ noses to tape them…
CVR
Just, before I forget, the GET languages thing, even if you take the previous one, for FP, IP and SP, if you look at the SO 3 in the old one, C2005, there's perhaps 2 or 3 references to enjoyment, reading for pleasure, or responding. All the rest of it is reading skills.

NH
So how do you assess what is for enjoyment?

CVR
If you check the latest one, there are even fewer references to reading for pleasure, responding; maybe there's one reference to emotions or feeling. And I take it that feeling is a very significant part of reading – the unique thing about fiction and poetry. It's not just an intellectual thing that goes on. You understand and you feel.

NH
The problem is that if the child is not engaging on an emotional level, the book is not doing its job, largely.

CVR
The kid, may feel, e.g. “that's not fair”; “wow! I wish I was there” – that kind of thing; so that fiction isn't fiction…

NH
Like, “I can't believe he lets his wife talk to him like that” – Macbeth.

CVR
And you have that feeling … conviction. So, I don't know whether it's important; it hardly gets a mention in the C2005 and the NCS. I don't know whether this is important. It worries me. I have a problem with that. Particularly when teachers say, I have to carry out the curriculum. There's very little about enjoying fiction; the rest of it is about reading skills, comprehension and so on.

NH
I have two responses. The one is that if there is no reading for enjoyment in the curriculum, then someone has missed the boat somewhere. They're not teaching kids to enjoy reading.
It’s mentioned there. About 5% or so
But on the other hand, by not mentioning it too much, there’s less control over it. There’s not even an attempt to control Something like that. So we won’t have some ridiculous block to be ticked when the kid has demonstrated that he has enjoyed …
But that very light weighting it has been given, very light weighting
It’s very sad.
Is it not on the other hand an indication that it’s not that important, and we don’t have to be bothered to assess it. It’s hardly mentioned.
I don’t think it should be assessed. That’s the first thing. It should not be assessed.
Do you think it’s maybe why it’s not been much mentioned?
Perhaps. But it’s so important.
So, is this a valid, legitimate classroom activity? You’re a teacher, and you’re saying that it’s a very important activity, that it’s a legitimate activity, enjoying the book, children getting involved in the story, and yet it’s not assessable? How can you give an account of what you are doing in your classroom, then?
The pain of a terrible question. If you’re going to be assessing everything in broken down, miniscule amounts as OBE is doing, I believe they should be giving
more weight, much more weight to that. But, I am not a big fan of OBE, of breaking things up.

CVR
Do you mean C2005?

NH
Yes, it’s just easier to say OBE.

CVR
I looked at Spady’s 1994 book – Outcome-based Education issues and problems – maybe he wrote the book for idiots, I don’t know. An outcome is a demonstration of something that has been achieved. He states it quite unambiguously. Knowledge, understanding, sympathy, empathy etc. they are not outcomes, so don’t come with these terms. You must have identify, classify, analyse, conclude – you either can or can’t do, achieve or not achieve. Now, knowledge and that sort of thing – we can accommodate that sort of thing as long as the child shows what s/he can do with what s/he knows or understands. So the outcome is what you can do, what you can demonstrate with what you can understand, or know. So that was what Spady was saying in his book.

NH
What I am hearing from you is that OBE should allow for those things that are not as tangible.

CVR
I’m not saying OBE should allow it; I’m not sure OBE can allow it. I’m not sure – the problem I’m investigating is, should it be done at all? Is OBE not just some contrived system that is making it pointless … if you really believe in involvement, how on earth can you make it fit into an outcome? There two things really: how can you plan for something that is so unpredictable (if it is unpredictable)…

NH
It is unpredictable, sure.

CVR
And the second thing, I mean the corollary of that is, how do you assess it, in terms of a demonstration?
Sally smiled at the appropriate time …

If Sally smiled at an inappropriate time –

Then she failed it. Outcome not yet achieved.

Outcome pending. You asked me, should OBE make allowance for these intangibles, and I said I don’t think it can; it oughtn’t to mess with reading.

Then the logic is, okay, then we take reading out; we leave reading off, which means that “oh, we don’t do any reading, then”. So then, to be logical, one should remove OBE and replace it with something that allows children to read and think …

But you said earlier that with OBE, what Spady said and what C2005 does are not the same thing. What do you think Bill and Pam Spady are saying compared to what has been happening?

I had a half-hour conversation with him at a party once. It wasn’t a very thought-out thing, but I think he was going on about – and it was my favourite bugbear – how do you record every miniscule little thing – and I gather he never intended for every little outcome and what it spawned.

I think he also had a problem with the way it was implemented. Not just the structure, but the way it was implemented. Instead of piloting the thing properly, it was done right across the country – eventually in grade 1. And what the complicatedness of C2005 obscures, are some of the issues that really bother me. You’re so busy matching SOs and AC, fitting them in with critical outcomes and so on, that one doesn’t even think about whether one should be doing this in the first place. Is it compatible, appropriate to this kind of work?
NH
What about the kids? The lesson isn’t going where it should be. You want to change it; but you have an outcome to achieve today. That outcome is in that direction. You want to go there, but you can’t do that; there’s no flexibility.

CVR
What would you do – would you change the direction of the lesson, or change the direction of the AC and SOs? What would you adapt?

NH
I’d forget about the AC and SOs and go with the kids. And probably sit afterwards and try to worm what I do into what was expected.

CVR
One of the teachers actually said to me, kids actually like outcomes – she certainly wasn’t buying into the whole thing, something you could ignore if you want to, that they were probably doing anyway – she said, from the kids’ point of view, they liked to know what they should be achieving.

NH
That is one thing that is nice. I give the kids a project to do, and I give them a rubric, and they know what they must do – even if they choose not to, it demystifies the marking process. Which is very bad for some teachers who like to wield the red pen as if it is holy, teachers who like to keep if a mystery why … got an A or whatever. Whereas kids are now perhaps more confident about coming up and saying, but why didn’t I achieve more than this?

CVR
That is when the teacher is marking it. Would this rubric allow enough room for a teacher’s judgement, instinct and judgement about what it’s worth?

NH
Often they don’t. I’ve often commented to my colleagues at Alex, and they all pretty much agree with me, that rubrics tend to give higher marks than you would give with a gut response. Time and again, even when I make my rubric harder so to speak …
CVR
Don’t you find that chopping it into say 5, 5, 5 or 10, 10, 10, or whatever it might be, what do I give out of 5 – 3? 4? The difference between the two percentage-wise is enormous. Even out of ten, the difference between 6 and 7 is a whole ten percent.

NH
On the one hand, because the kids know exactly what we’re looking for, they can give it to us, which I suppose is good, but it makes it just a little bit easy to be lazy. You know, that’s what I have to do to get the minimum.

CVR
Does a rubric allow for a really gifted piece of writing?

NH
I would say yes. It allows, generally speaking, for things at the very top and the very bottom. I give a mark according to the rubric, and then I go to town; I write all over it; this is what impressed me the most … I tend to overcompensate with my comments.

CVR
Kids like to know what you based it on. What about your colleagues? Is there some consistency about the way it’s done, or is it a matter of individual interpretation – is there a policy in the school or department –

NH
Marking practices or general classroom practices?

CVR
Let’s say English in Grade 8 or 9.

NH
Generally speaking there’s a work scheme, and – I’ve worked at a school where you’re pretty much told what to do, and I’ve worked at a school where I’ve been pretty much left alone to do a term’s work. And there’s a person in charge of that grade who checks up – no, wrong word – checks up that you’re okay. They are there to help you.
CVR
Do colleagues of yours and you yourself, get stressed out about this, do you experience tension about teaching like you want to teach, but if kids want to go in a direction and you want to go in that direction, but there’s an outcome that says something else, does that cause tension, does that cause frustration?

NH
Irritation. When I was at my first school this year, I tried very hard to do it the right way – these are the outcomes for the week –

CVR
Were the outcomes laid down?

NH
Yes, and I was an unhappy camper. I really was. I was trying to push my teaching style into something that wasn’t accommodating. When I switched to my second school, I felt that something in me just gave; I was in a bigger staff then, and I said to the head of English, “I don’t know what’s going on; just let me know if there is something I should be doing”. And I just did my thing. Ja, the point is, I have been both ways; I’ve allowed it to stress me out, I tried to fit my style into it, and it wasn’t very successful for me.

CVR
And you didn’t try now in the second semester.

NH
I didn’t try very hard.

CVR
And the result?

NH
I was a much happier person, as a teacher.

CVR
And the response from the colleagues – those who were trying to make it fit?
NH
Fine. Well the thing is; I’m a fairly good teacher; I can get the kids through the work, and because I was doing that, and I was able to produce the necessary pieces to mark, and paperwork, which Paul was saying – “Fine, I’ll do it” – you know what I’m saying? IT was a privileged position, and it left me to get my work done. And the CTAs came along, and Alex decided they weren’t going to do it – such a load of rubbish – way below what our kids were capable of.

CVR
Yet you are leaving now.

NH
One of my reasons for leaving Alex was the SA Education Department system… The pressure that teachers are placed under to do something that isn’t very practical had an effect on my decision to leave.

CVR
Do you think OBE had a lot to do with that?

NH
Yeah… yeah. I’ve been teaching for five years, one of which was overseas, so I don’t have much experience of anything else. During my training there was reference to OBE that was coming.

CVR
Let’s talk about reading.

NH
By the time the kids get to me they either are readers or they are not. When they are readers, you just leave them pretty much alone. With a setwork book, they read it in a week and carry on.

CVR
When you say you let them alone, do you mean you don’t intervene? What happens in the class, then?

NH
Are we talking about a situation where – I mean there’s different kinds of reading in class – there’s reading aloud, (reading for marks!), there’s “I’d like you to sit
and read for half an hour”, there’s read this and do this task, there is read this and do this in groups. There are different scenarios – whatever happens to be the most interesting.

CVR
Let’s talk about something that irritated someone I interviewed – worksheets.
Why worksheets?
NH
I use a lot of worksheets, but not necessarily to do with reading; I’m far more likely to use a worksheet to do with some theme. Reading then just becomes a rung on a ladder. The problem is that different kids have different abilities in reading. I’ve seen it in groups. Four kids – one is a reader – as I say, you just leave him alone. The other three have different abilities; they often come from backgrounds where English is not the mother tongue, and you are working with English (mother tongue) texts. There’s often a lack of comprehension; and the others simply aren’t interested. It’s very different from reading short pieces. Does that come close to your interest? Only a well-trained psychologist – psychometrist?
CVR
I don’t know about metrist – measuring …
NH
Anyhow, only someone really trained is likely to make any sense of what is actually going on in his brain.
CVR
No, I don’t mean, with what goes on in a person’s head, the neurological …
NH
Even the links that go on between emotions.
CVR
Yes, the links, the schemata. Let’s talk about schemata. It’s the first time we’ve mentioned it today. The schemata that one brings to a book, especially the life schemata, would be modified by what you’re reading, or seeing, or hearing or hearing about …
And the latest thing might be modified by what you have

What you are bringing to it.

I think that only a person who is well trained for working with a child would have any kind of insight into that. All that you can work with is what the child can feed to you.

I don’t think you have to be a trained psychologist to (do that)

Just a teacher…

You know, there are a lot of critics, writers, teachers who do action research, who observe things, find things out, and who publish articles in books about reader response, who are generally known as reader-response critics, who observe these things happening, and the way kids respond. Emotionally…

How do you judge that?

How do you judge? You can’t tell what’s happening inside, but you can tell them to talk about it. And write about it.

Mm, there are all sorts of other things that kick in there. Maybe the child doesn’t want to talk about it; maybe the child has a headache…so what you get out at the other end – here’s the reading experience, here’s the mediator or facilitator; the reading experience goes on in here; most of us don’t know what’s happening there. All we have to work on is what the child (gives?) out; the child is meant to talk, or write, or whatever –

Or share with someone else.
Now the child can be influenced by so many other things. As I say, the child has a headache; the child is very eager to please; whatever it is; I’m not sure how much of this, tells us about this (gestures).

The child might not feel like concentrating, or teacher’s watching me, or Who’s that funny man with a pencil writing down every time that I smile? I don’t know how real that is.

Or she’s got her eye on someone in the class.

At the same time it doesn’t mean one must walk away from it. This is important. But I don’t know how it must be important. I’m distrustful of systems that say “this is what we can do”.

“This is what one can do.”

Do you know what I’m getting at? The process of reading is so private. And I’m not sure that the product you get-

Is it a product?

It is a product, but it’s mediated by so many other things, I’m not sure how true a product.

… One (OBE trainer) kept talking about “possible products of assessment” – in relation to literature – the whole focus of these teacher trainers is that they’re dealing with teachers who lack so much background – who “lack a reference
field”. What they were going on about is not so much about the concepts of what happens when one reads, and the luxury of considering whether outcomes are an appropriate way of designing and assessing reading activities. No, they’re more concerned about helping poor teachers – to give them some resources to go on with, give them ideas of what you can look for… as to whether outcomes are compatible is largely wasted, premature. So they maybe just made a passing comment about these issues before going on to what the real issues are.

NH

At the moment most teachers are unable to make much sense of what’s needed of them. I think most teachers are doing what they hope is okay. Some of the more ‘progressive’ schools (but not necessarily) have put a lot of effort into decoding what is needed, to varying degrees of success. But mostly I think, teachers are just angry and bewildered, dumped with a lot of paperwork which doesn’t make terribly much sense. And then some of the time teachers are saying, what happens when the child is reading – ja … you can understand if some might say “who cares?”

CVR

Some critics have actually said (like Michael Benton and Peter Benton), literature is not something that you should maybe even try and assess, or the study of literature should not be assessed… That’s the other end of the spectrum – that it’s so ‘untouchable’ in a sense - that there’s so much instinct, and so much private, personal input, response. Anyway, that is what fascinated me about putting something like reading, responding to things like well-written stories and poems, together outcomes; putting them into the same cage and seeing what happens. Conceptually it seems to me there is a lot that is incompatible because reading is such a private thing; first of all if you can plan that 35 people will largely respond in a particular way, or that this will be the outcome for them all. If it’s going to be for them all, then it’s going to be such a broad outcome that it’s probably meaningless anyway.

NH

Outcomes could be to explore how people feel, but it’s not an actual outcome.
CVR
Not a measurable one. Then you would assess it by...

NH
I wouldn't. In my world that’s all you do. Kids know when they’re being assessed; if they’re not being assessed, it’s not worth worrying about. But kids pay attention if they know that the red pen will be used somewhere along the line.

CVR
In another interview it was said that you don’t assess everything, and that the things that are not assessed, the kids don’t immediately seize on and say – because I anticipated an “Is it for marks?” syndrome? (Told about CW’s oral self-assessment procedure.) It doesn’t tend to make much difference whether it’s for marks or not.

NH
I generally find that self and peer assessment don’t work particularly well. Time and again the kids go for the middle option, time and again, and every now and again I will sit with my document – my assessment – which is, say, 20 out of 30 and the peer of self assessment, which is 28 out of 30. And I look at what has been ticked, and the child thinks they have done fabulously in the grammar, or whatever.
APPENDIX 9

TRANSCRIPT: INTERVIEW WITH CW (PRIMARY SCHOOL)

CW:
We were very skeptical about it (OBE) because every group that went for training came back with something different … What we preferred to do was “let’s experiment with this aspect. Let’s experiment with this … and get some people to come up with rubrics. We’ve done quite a bit of experiment, but we haven’t put the whole thing together, because we’ve been waiting.

CVR:
Everyone hasn’t gone into it in the same way …

CW:
I really can’t say that as a school we have a uniform policy where we’ve all followed, and what have you, but … now they’ve come out with the revised curriculum, now is the time we actually have to …

I’ve had some difficulty with your questionnaire, because it almost presupposes that in the junior school reading a literature or what have you is taught as literature, which has not been the case in junior school. Basically what we’ve done in language, and we’ve done all along and we’ve continued to do it because it does fit in with OBE requirements is … the skills of reading in a variety of ways which is … reading for study, reading for instruction – that sort of thing, but we obviously promote the reading of fiction and for example, we still have a book in the classroom that we read with the children; we still have a book that we read to the children. We – the actual teaching of reading – I’m only teaching Grade 5, so I can only comment there – um, it’s based on a lot of different kinds of texts. Some of those will be fiction, but not all of them. So, you know, it’s not that we study a book like a setwork book in terms of literature … that’s why the impression given (in the questionnaire) is that it’s almost like setwork.

CVR:
I didn’t quite mean that, although if you look at the learning outcome 3, there’re a lot of things there about the conventions of story, about characters, about analysing; they talk about all sorts of things from Grade 4 right up to –

CW:  
But I've always done that in an informal way. You can see on my questionnaire there – I find the use of the term worksheets over and over again very irritating, quite frankly, because ... that is what is happening in so many schools ... which totally for me, kills the whole thing. There are lots of other ways to assess ... If we've just done an ordinary reading book, we try to choose authors who have written more than one book, the aim being that if a child likes that book he’s going to read another one by the same author ... enjoyment is a big part of it, but the discussion of it – why did he make the main character a boy and not a girl – that sort of thing – is done more in an oral discussion way, and it could be done in a group work way, it can be done in a one on one, because, you know, we assess it less formally and we’ve never – in the past we’ve never had to report on it, but it’s been part of the literature study. Um, I think the kids find it interesting, and you know my big thing in teaching is the writing – that’s the thing I enjoy most. But you can learn from the reading – for example at the moment we’re reading a Dick Kind Smith book – Dragon Boy – it’s about this boy who lives with the dragon ... it’s a story where the dragon family go away on holiday, and the boy is left behind with a wolf cub, and they take the story ... and they tell you about the dragon and about the boy and the wolf, and they reach a crisis point. So the two stories run parallel and are eventually going to merge. So those sorts of techniques are things that the kids actually enjoy discussing, and they can look for it in the reading, so I don’t find that a problem at all – I’ve always done that.

CVR:  
Because they get involved in the story ...

CW:  
Because they get involved in the story, and suddenly it changes theme – why did the writer change the theme now? It’s a kind of natural progression from reading
the book that you ask questions about it – why – but it’s never been – for me – a
formal assessment of it.

CVR:
Because of the concerns expressed in Curriculum 2005 and in the draft and final
revised curriculum, there’s been so much concern for knowledge about – you
know – the genres and sub-genres and things like that; knowledge about fiction,
and so on. And so this is why I wanted, in the questionnaire, to spread it quite
widely and find out what people are doing. This questionnaire covers from
teachers of Grade 4 right through to teachers of Grade 9, which is covered by
Curriculum 2005. So I wanted to cover everything and to see what people said
about things. I think I should just nail my colours to the mast and to say that what
for me is a problem – and I would like you to respond to this if you would – the
problem is this, that in all versions that have come out so far – from the 1997
policy documents and revisions of June and October (2001), and now the final
document of June this year, there’s been very little attention give to the
imaginative side and to enjoyment. “Read and enjoy” is mentioned once, and that
is it. They might imply that you might respond – the word “respond” is used once,
but the vast bulk of the concerns about – you know – reading and viewing (the
name of learning outcome 3 in Languages), is about – knowledge about things,
like technical knowledge about things and being able to analyse things, and this
is my problem: so little attention is given to informal, almost ‘non-assessable’
types of things that happen in reading.

CW:
Can I respond to that. OK, first of all – this probably shouldn’t be on the record,
but we have always done our own thing and ‘got away with it’ over the years.
Secondly, I believe that any syllabus, curriculum, whatever you want to call it, is
the bare minimum, and the richness of that curriculum depends on the teacher
involved, which is its strength and its weakness, because if you don’t have
people with the ability to explain and enrich it and what have you, you are only
going to explain those … six things listed there … So that is a problem … for me,
I’ve always done that kind of discussion, and I never assessed it. It’s not about,
for me, assessing it, but the child who doesn’t do well in that kind of discussion will progress because he’s going to get used to the kinds of things you’re going to ask. Years ago when I taught Std 2, which was over fifteen years ago, we had a book which was called White (indistinct) and it was about Red Indians and about how he grows up and what have you. There is a direct parallel in all the sorts of rituals … with any tribal culture, and at that stage they were learning about the Bushmen and the this and the that, and we always did read it and compare it, and how does it compare to the people that you know, which … and that kind of brought it (across) … more real and made the enjoyment of it.

I think those kinds of things can support the enjoyment. You know, for me, that’s not a problem. I think it’s important to do those skills, but I also agree with you that the reading just to enrich oneself is a form of enjoyment and opening new horizons to you and a form of escape and a stress relief and all those kinds of things are just as important. I don’t know that we actually need to assess them on that.

CVR:
Some critics, teachers, action researchers and so on, have said – some of them have actually said, can literature be taught – even at high school? You don’t find that if it’s not going to be tested it’s ‘not important’?

CW:
The reading book … the fiction becomes an integral part – we’ve done the apostrophe to contract. The kids absolutely love the story; okay, so we’ve had twenty minutes of reading today, but now when we read, we’re also looking at apostrophes – we’re going to notice apostrophes and when we get to the full stop in that sentence, you put your hand up if you saw an apostrophe. You say what it is and you explain what it’s being used for. And by the end of the lesson no.1: everyone totally loved the story; no.2: they picked up every apostrophe; no.3: they could explain the use of every one. WE hadn’t done possession yet, but they obviously saw the difference – they had picked up the fact that sometimes the
apostrophe is … after the S, and why. They had spoken about the fact that contractions usually appear in the direct speech, where the other form would be in the text … but we hadn’t had a worksheet. I mean, that obviously was my objective, but we did it informally – the kids absolutely loved it – they still knew what was going on in the story. I think … because it’s new and people are trying to do it to the letter of the law, if you think back, I never assessed every lesson formally. I might do that … and later down the line … I may have some sort of assessment based on that. But we need to be careful that we think we have to assess formally every single minute of every single day. We can’t do it – impossible – and you’re killing the teaching, which – you know – is your point.

CVR:
I’m also doing the same thing with my students – also using a story to “crack” tenses – when do you use “will” and when do you use “would” – they do predictions about what you think “will happen”, or “would happen if…” All sorts of things one can do in and round about a story …

CW:
But these shouldn’t become more important than the story …

CVR:
No – just using the story as a launch pad …

CW:
It just shows how in the real world people do use those things – real writers use those things – it’s not just a grammar exercise they have to do because (teacher) says so.

CVR:
What I try to put to them too – that when they teach children that when they are referring to the future, they don’t just teach them to use “I will or shall”, because people don’t speak like that –

CW:
Nobody uses “shall” anymore.
CVR:
I will means “I’m going to”, and so on … Another aspect of response … is the individuality of it – one of the basic premises of what I’m doing is that each individual child will bring something individual as experience, memories, background, whatever you like, into the reading of it, especially the imagination, creativity… To actually say, using OBE, that you must have an outcome for what you’re doing is … presumptuous; it’s, uh, wrong-headed to feel that the end of wherever, at a certain point, the children are going to have achieved something, whether they will realise this, or know that, or understand this, feel this way or that way … do you think …

CW:
I think there’re two things there; I think you can have that you expect them to come up with an answer but not the answer. There’s too much “the predetermined answer” – the whole point of an exercise like that is that “you’ve read this piece of fiction: draw a picture of that character as he appears in your mind and then we put them up and we see we’ve got six or seven different sizes and shapes and whatever. What do they have in common? Why is it common? Because it actually said he was taller and so on. What’s different? Why is it different? How come … So the outcome is that they would be able to recognise that there is some difference and why. It’s not that the outcome is that this is what the character is going to look like. And you know, the thing is … I’m really the wrong person to talk to – the type of thing I’m doing in my enrichment programme – I want people to have an opinion of their own, but to be able to back it up, and so to me … it doesn’t occur to me … that they should all come up with the same answer.

CVR:
Even the literary critics who go very much towards the reader and the role of the reader, and who might seem to suggest that any response is fine … acknowledge that if you can’t back it up – refer back to the text – one answer is less appropriate than another one.
CW:
And that would be part of discussion, surely, that, you know, you have to back it up with evidence. You're going to pick up mistakes, if you want to call it that, but the point is, that person learns not that he's wrong, that it's important to look more carefully at the evidence — that's what you want him to come up with — not that he was right or wrong. What has he learnt, to be better next time? Um, you know, it comes down to interpretation. I'm one of those people who want to skim over things, get an impression, say right, these are the things I want to do, what is more interesting and — you know — take it from there. It is important, study skills, skimming and scanning and that sort of thing — they are important, but they're not the only thing you're going to do.

CVR:
I don't know if you've worked in the past with specific outcomes. Have you formed any impression about how broad or vague they are? Some people say they are so broad you can fit just about anything into them ... not being specific, not being detailed enough.

CW:
Well, you know, six of one, half a dozen of another — when they're too specific they complain; when they're too broad, we complain. Teachers in the classroom have been trained — many have been trained — this is what you do, and do it; there was the syllabus and it was comfortable. I think that ... I like the less specific nature of it because it gives you more scope, because when you're going to apply it, the way I apply it won't be the same (as another's). Because I've got a different school population, there're lots of other factors ... I tend to see what ... I can do, not what I can't do, sort of thing ... so I don't see the limits — I see the gaps rather than the limits ... it has the potential for me to say ... I can do it ... they keep on and on at all these workshops when they first started, saying this is the bare minimum, and the sky's the limit and go where you want to go. The problem is, the majority of teachers in this country are not trained to do this ...
CVR:
When you get outcomes like (LO3) it sounds wonderful, and assessment standards have now replaced all the other indicators and measures ... it comes up with “identifies” ... “describes and analyses” ... do you find these are so open that I don’t have to worry about them, because it doesn’t give any levels of — you know, this is Grade 5 I’m reading here. Grade 6 says “explains interpretation and overall response to text” rather than just “describe”. What does “explain” mean; what does “describe” mean; what is a good description, a good explanation? And you find maybe that —
CW:
I think that the majority of teachers would find it a bit daunting because they’re looking at the plan and wondering, now what exactly do you want me to do? How am I going to demonstrate that, because over and over again, the learning outcome is a demonstration of the ability to do something, so how am I going to get this child to demonstrate, and I think that’s where the whole worksheet thing comes in, and it becomes in many cases an artificial assessment because you’ve got to have something on paper, you’ve got to show where you did it.
CVR:
Two respondents to the questionnaire referred to a “paper-chase”. The word “demonstration” and “tangible” I lifted out and I used quite a bit ... and you mention now this is to be a demonstration ...
CW:
And ... and you just want to say now, how am I going to get them to do it, so the easiest thing is to have some kind of demonstration, and for me, I can’t stand them. I just can’t stand them, because, invariably, in order to put it down on paper in that form ... it becomes what you’re saying, a predetermined kind of response. It’s very difficult to keep it open, if you’re going to use these, you know, lime multiple choice, (indistinct), and that kind of thing. You get away from what you can do in a discussion.
CVR:
If some of us said, though, “but how do you get marks for the kids?” what do you say –

CW:
Well, basically, I haven’t marked those things …

CVR:
So where do you “get your marks from for English” …

CW:
Well, again, you see, in reading you get marks for reading skills, you wouldn’t give marks for … well you might give marks for interpretation of a text and that sort of thing, but you wouldn’t, especially in Grade 5, - I’m not going to expect them to expand on the novel, and that whole (kind of) thing.

CVR:
I’ve got a question – would you go along with the idea that much of what happens when children read – I’m talking about fiction – I’m talking about that kind of reading now, much of what happens when children read, goes on inside their heads and cannot be tested or demonstrated in a tangible way – that is the question that I had over here, but I think you’ve answered it for me. Why bother, why go and make an artificial exercise out of it?

CW:
Why do we need to – I would say the only thing one needed to assess is where there is perhaps a concept involved, which you want defined and you want to make sure that they actually understand that, then maybe there’s a need to … and when you’re teaching them about forming opinions and basing opinions on the evidence that’s there, I mean, you know, we all do those things – what will happen next – we have to base it on what you know about the character, what’s happened in the story so far – all those kinds of things. So, perhaps there’s an opening for it over there, but I don’t think we have to assess every single response.


South African Institute for Distance Education. 2001. *SAIDE Response to Aspects of the Revised Curriculum Strategy*. Braamfontein: SAIDE.


