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CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS OF THE READER-RESPONSE APPROACH IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

A systematic review (1989–2024)

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Abstract

Rosenblatt's reader-response theory, with its emphasis on the reader's role in co-creating meaning, offers insights for enhancing students' literary experience. This systematic review examined the implementation of the approach within primary and secondary education, focusing on pedagogical practices, text choices, and benefits of reader-response approach for aesthetic engagement. The analysis of 39 empirical studies (1989-2024) revealed four key practices: literature discussions, free response writing and creative writing, reading modality practices, and teacher read-alouds. These practices all emphasize the role of the aesthetic transaction between text and reader in enhancing the reading experience. The review also identified genres such as realistic fiction, multicultural literature, picture books, graphic novels, Gothic literature, humorous fiction, and historical fiction, that have been used in studies applying Rosenblatt's theory to enhance aesthetic engagement. These studies explored the potential of such texts to enhance aesthetic engagement, particularly when text choices align with students' interests and backgrounds. Furthermore, the review found that the reader-response approach promotes several key benefits: fostering personal connections and deeper engagement, enhancing personal and literary understanding, fostering empathy, and promoting identity construction. These findings advocate for a pedagogical shift toward practices that prioritize personal connections, interpretive freedom, and the holistic development of readers.

Keywords: Rosenblatt, reader-response theory, pedagogical practices, narrative fiction, aesthetic engagement

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1. INTRODUCTION

Research (Barber & Klauda, 2020; Hooper, 2020; Lerkkanen, 2018; OECD, 2019; Webber et al., 2023, 2025) shows a constant reduction in reading motivation and engagement from childhood to adolescence, with enjoyment levels among teenagers at an all-time low. Despite the well-documented benefits of reading, international assessments such as PISA (Barber & Klauda, 2020; OECD, 2019) reveal a consistent global decline in child and adolescent engagement in reading. This issue is also salient in Finland, where similar patterns have been observed (Lerkkanen, 2018). Additionally, studies tracking media use suggest a potential displacement effect, where adolescents' increased time spent on digital media (e.g. the internet, social media, and gaming) corresponds to decreased time dedicated to reading print materials (e.g.,Twenge et al., 2019). This shift toward digital media is significant because the nature of many online reading experiences—often characterized by scanning and quick information retrieval—contrasts with the sustained, immersive focus required for deep, personal engagement in reading (Loh & Sun, 2019). This contrast highlights the pressing need to identify and implement pedagogical approaches that encourage students to connect both intellectually and emotionally with what they read whether in print or online (McGeown & Smith, 2024).

Research emphasizes the importance of students engaging with literature, particularly narrative fiction, due to its positive effects on cognitive flexibility, reading comprehension, focus, and vocabulary development (e.g., Cartwright, 2008; Jerrim & Moss, 2019; Mol & Bus, 2011; Pfost et al., 2013; Philips, 2015). Moreover, literature offers an aesthetic experience, described as a "vivid, complex, holistic experience" that encompasses intellect, emotion, behavior, sensation, enculturation, and environment (Lankford, 1992, p. 24). Despite these perceived benefits and intrinsic value of literature, it is often underrepresented in school curricula (Fialho, 2019), and its implementation in classrooms is often reduced to a means of achieving other learning objectives, such as general literacy (Gabrielsen et al., 2019; Wintersparv et al., 2019). Further, recent research illuminates the complexities surrounding the perceived benefits of literary reading. Teachers may emphasize developing a broader worldview, but students themselves often prioritize the functional benefits of reading literature, such as improved language skills and general reading proficiency. This suggests that students view literature education through a qualification-oriented lens rather than considering its cultural, social, or psychological benefits (Dera, 2025). This disconnect is further compounded by heterogeneous conceptions of what constitutes "real literature" (Dera, 2025). All these factors create a challenge for literature education: how to foster the genuine, personal engagement in an achievement-oriented classroom environment (Dera, 2025; Nissen et al., 2021). Cremin et al.'s (2014) work is particularly insightful in this regard. Their research underscores the experience of "living through the text" (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994) and engaging with the text affectively, focusing on the

pleasure and satisfaction of reading. This underscores the importance of a pedagogical approach that fosters these lived-through experiences.

Scholars such as Ivey and Johnston (2013; 2015) advocate integrating the social and emotional aspects of reading to foster deeper engagement, motivation and pleasure. Turner et al. (2019) conceptualizes reading as a mindful, social, and recursive practice embedded in peer networks and online communities rather than as a linear, solitary act. This shift highlights the urgent need to investigate responsive pedagogical approaches that can leverage collaborative and networked reading practices to foster deeper literary engagement. Frameworks such as "Connected Reading" describe how adolescents now encounter, evaluate, and engage with texts in a recursive manner within their peer networks and online communities (Turner et al., 2019). This presents a new pedagogical opening: if reading is a social and interactional process for students, then Rosenblatt's transactional theory, which emphasizes the reader's active role and the social context of meaning-making, could be a vital framework.

Louise M. Rosenblatt's reader-response theory (1994, 1938/1995) highlights the transactional relationship between reader and text which could create engagement and student-centeredness to reading instruction. Davis (1992) confirms this, stating that Rosenblatt's approach to reading is a unified theory for reading instruction. Scholars have widely argued the potential of Rosenblatt's reader-response approach to enhance literary engagement, and continue to assert that adapting her theory to contemporary contexts is valuable for building the aesthetic literary experiences that modern students need (Cena & Allred, 2018). For example, practitioner-focused studies have used classroom observations to demonstrate its effectiveness in fostering insightful and engaged readers (Spiegel, 1998). Others have drawn on seminar experiences with graduate students to emphasize the significance of cultivating safe classroom environments for aesthetic reading (Calderwood, 2005; Ryan & Dagostino, 2015). While these papers underscore the theory's value, they are primarily theoretical and reflective. Even empirical works in this area have focused on contexts such as responses to informational texts (Robinson, 2020).

This literature review aims to explore how and why Rosenblatt's theory might be useful in enhancing the students' reading engagement. Prior literature reviews have explored Rosenblatt's theory's application in specific domains such as poetry (Sigvardsson, 2017) and intercultural communication (Heggernes, 2021), or synthesized its use in practical classroom interventions aimed at specific outcomes such as gaining insight into human nature (Schrijvers et al., 2019). However, a broad synthesis of its application over time is lacking. Therefore, this paper focuses on a research gap concerning empirical research applying Rosenblatt's theory and its significance in teaching narrative fiction in primary and secondary schools across 1989–2024 period. This timeframe emerged from the systematic search itself; 1989 marks the publication of the first empirical study that met the inclusion criteria.

2. ROSENBLATT'S TRANSACTIONAL THEORY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Rosenblatt's reader-response theory is not new. She first introduced it in 1938 in her seminal work Literature as Exploration (1938/1995). Since then, it has been considered as one of the foundational frameworks in literature education (Choo, 2013; Dressman & Webster, 2001). Rosenblatt (1938/1995) argues that the meaning of a text is constructed through a transaction between the reader and the text in a dynamic interaction, with neither the text nor the reader holding primacy over the other. According to Rosenblatt´s theory, readers bring their personal experiences, emotions, and background knowledge to the text and these influence text interpretation and response. Therefore, it encourages a pedagogical orientation that transcends traditional literary analysis, focusing on reader's activity and agency leading to pleasure and engagement in reading (Yandell et al., 2020).

While Rosenblatt's transactional theory provides a foundational understanding of the dynamic interplay between reader and text, its unique contribution within reader-response theory warrants further contextualization. Unlike theorists such as Iser (1978), who emphasized the "implied reader" and textual gaps, or Fish (1980) who developed the notion of "interpretive communities" and Barthes (1975) who advocated reader's own interpretation and declared the "death of the author", Rosenblatt's enduring significance lies in her emphasis on the reader's lived experience (Soosaar, 2024) and the pedagogical implications of fostering genuine, personal engagement with literature (Beach, 1993). Her work, categorized by Beach (1993) within the experiential perspective of reader-response theories, prioritizes the individual's subjective meaning-making process, a process that is nevertheless understood to be deeply social and dialogic. Rosenblatt's pedagogy is not one of isolated introspection; rather, it sees the classroom as a space where personal responses are shared, negotiated, and enriched through communal discussion (Dressman, 2004). This student-oriented paradigm, significantly influenced by Rosenblatt, gained considerable prominence in literature education since the 1970s, particularly evident in primary and lower secondary contexts (Pieper, 2015; Witte & Sâmihaian, 2013). The principles of Rosenblatt's reader-response theory are also evident in more recent theories of reading. For example, transformative reading model states that purpose of literature lies in the transformative experience itself and in how literature deepens readers' perceptions of themselves and others (Fialho, 2019).

In Rosenblatt's theory the interaction with the text ranges from purely efferent to deep aesthetic (Rosenblatt, 1982, 1994, 1995). The aesthetic responses are integral to the theory and occur when readers immerse themselves in the text, experiencing it emotionally and subjectively (Rosenblatt, 1988). This aligns with Dewey's notion of aesthetic experiences, which integrate intellectual and emotional engagement with art and literature (Dewey, 1934). In Rosenblatt´s theory, an aesthetic reading stance may involve activities such as visualizing scenes or characters, drawing connections between the story and personal or literary

experiences, and empathizing with characters (Many et al., 1996). Conversely, efferent reading is predominantly concerned with the extraction of information (Rosenblatt, 1982, 1994, 1995). During aesthetic reading, attention can shift to efferent analysis for literary judgment and during efferent reading, a general idea might be highlighted through an aesthetic experience (Savolainen, 2020; Rosenblatt, 1988). By indicating a clear distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading, Rosenblat (1995) highlights the need for aesthetic teaching practices that encourage personal engagement and interpretation.

According to Rosenblatt (1995) teachers serve as facilitators, modeling and guiding students to cultivate aesthetic and interpretive responses (Calderwood, 2005; Cuero, 2008), to deepen their personal engagement with the text and to create an environment that prioritizes the reader's aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1995). In such an environment, teachers must guide students "to pay attention to the interfusion of sensuous, cognitive, and affective elements" of the reading experience (Rosenblatt, 1986, p. 27). This means crafting open-ended prompts that encourage readers to articulate personal thoughts and feelings, moving beyond simple plot summaries (Hancock, 2000) and facilitating open-ended discussions rather than focusing on single correct interpretations (Dugan, 1997; Fialho, 2019). In these discussions, students should go beyond simply recalling information to engage in aesthetic transactions, such as student-led inquiries, critical analysis, and demonstrations of empathy. Wiseman (2011) suggests that a teacher-led read-aloud could be a vital practice within this pedagogy, as it establishes a shared experience from which these individual and social transactions can emerge (see also Rosenblatt, 1995). Rosenblatt (1995) further underscores the democratic implications of this approach, which validates student responses and fosters open dialogue by centering the reader's voice and experience (Davis, 1992; Pradl, 1991).

As a means for fostering aesthetic engagement, Rosenblatt (1995) emphasizes the importance of selecting texts that resonate with students' interests and backgrounds. As Rosenblatt puts it, "the books a child or adolescent should read depends on his intellectual and emotional readiness. The classics might be more appropriate than some esoteric contemporary author, but in many cases, comparatively recent works will speak more profoundly and constructively to the boy and girl than will much "greater" works of the past" (1995, p. 222). Rosenblatt's emphasis on the personal aesthetic transaction provides the meaning-making foundation that motivates and informs the social, collaborative exchange found in contemporary practices like Turner's connected reading (Turner et al., 2019).

Despite its widespread influence, Rosenblatt's theory has faced three main lines of criticism. First is the argument that the efferent-aesthetic continuum initially underplayed the role of critical reading, leading some scholars to propose a distinct "critical-analytical" stance (Lewis, 2000; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; Soter et al., 2008). Soter et al (2010) found that a student's personal, emotional, and experiential response to a text—which is often called an "aesthetic response" —frequently lacks the crucial element of reflecting on the text's role in shaping that response. They

argue that the term "aesthetic response" is often misapplied to personal, emotional, or experiential responses that lack a simultaneous reflection on the literary work itself. A second critique highlights the normative dimensions of her work, particularly her implicit hierarchy of "real literature" over "pulp" fiction (Dressman, 2004). According to Dressman (2004) Rosenblatt elevates “the literary work of art” above what she describes as “trash” or works of “mediocrity” (Rosenblatt, 1995, pp. 200–1). The third line of criticism addresses the theory's potential monocultural dimensions, noting her specific framing of diversity. This framing, as Vytniorgu (2018) explains, favored "cultural pluralism" over "multiculturalism" out of a fear that the latter could lead to "aggressive withdrawal" into ethnic enclaves, which she saw as a danger to democracy. These critiques are crucial not merely as historical context, but because they raise a central question for this review: To what extent are these dimensions of Rosenblatt’s theory—both her core pedagogical principles and her more contested normative stances—still visible in the empirical applications of her work over the past three decades?

3. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This systematic literature review examines pedagogical practices, text choices and the perceived benefits of the Rosenblatt’s reader-response theory in teaching narrative fiction in classrooms. The study addresses the following research questions:

1) What pedagogical practices have been employed to enhance and examine primary and secondary students’ aesthetic engagement with narrative fiction?
2) Which genres and types of texts have been used to enhance aesthetic engagement with literature among students?
3) What are the perceived benefits of reader-response approach for students’ aesthetic engagement with narrative fiction?

4. METHODS

This study comprises a systematic literature review evaluating and synthesizing empirical studies that employ diverse research designs (Booth et al., 2021; Pluye et al., 2009). The review was conducted based on Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (PRISMA; Moher et al., 2009), which involve formulating clear questions and explicit methods to identify, select, and critically appraise relevant research, as well as collect and analyze data from the studies included in the review. Providing a transparent account of methods ensures rigor and reproducibility (Booth et al., 2021; Pluye et al., 2009).

4.1 Literature search

Multiple information sources were used to identify relevant studies. A systematic database search was first conducted on August 11, 2021, and updated on August 12, 2025 using the following databases: ERIC (EBSCO); Education Source; ProQuest Education Database; SCOPUS; and Web of Science. Boolean operators were modified for each database, and Rayyan QCRI (Ouzzani et al., 2016) was used to screen and select articles.

The search strategy comprised synonyms and database subject terms (Booth et al., 2021; Pluye et al., 2009) for three primary concepts: aesthetic reading; narrative fiction; and educational levels (primary and secondary students). Although Rosenblatt's reader-response theory was first proposed in 1938, no publication date limit was set to capture any earlier articles with similar concepts. The search terms included clusters with Boolean operators: ("aesthetic reading" OR "aesthetic stance" OR ["transactional theory" AND reading] OR "aesthetic transaction*" OR "literary transaction*" OR Rosenblatt*), with limiters for peer-reviewed sources, English language, and academic journals.

4.2 Selection of relevant literature

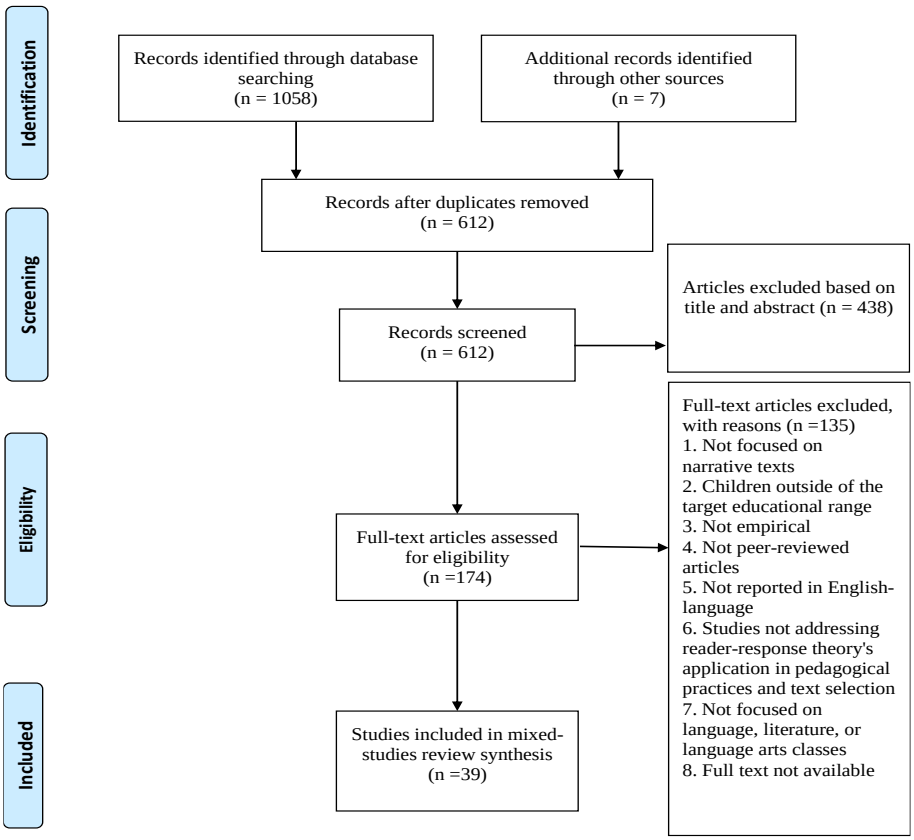
The inclusion criteria were used to identify relevant studies, specifying the type of literature to be included (Booth et al., 2021). The research focused on peer-reviewed articles employing Rosenblatt's reader-response approach and aiming to foster aesthetic engagement through pedagogical practices, text choices and with participants ranging from primary to secondary school levels. For this systematic review, the search only returned studies published in English, but the nationality of the authors and linguistic and cultural contexts of the studies varied. In the search a total of 1,058 records were identified through database searching, and an additional 7 records were found by manually checking the reference lists of articles screened for full-text eligibility. After removing duplicates, 612 records remained for screening. The selection process began by screening the titles and abstracts of these 612 articles based on inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1.). This initial screening was conducted by the first author. During this screening phase, 438 articles were excluded, leaving 174 articles for full-text assessment. During the eligibility phase, these 174 full-text articles were read entirely and evaluated again against the criteria (Table 1.) to ensure their suitability for the data. The full-text assessment was also conducted by the first author. After this rigorous assessment, a final 39 studies were included in the review synthesis. As screening was conducted by a single author, inter-rater reliability was not formally assessed during the screening and eligibility phases. Instead, reliability measures were implemented during the subsequent data extraction and coding phases of the included 39 studies, as detailed in the data analysis section. The identification process and the number of articles at each phase

are presented in the figure below (Figure 1) and the criteria for exclusion and inclusion in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Participants ranging from primary/elementary to high school levels	Participants outside of the targeted educational range
Peer-reviewed studies	Not peer-reviewed studies
Empirical research	Theoretical or conceptual studies, meta-analyses, literature reviews, and academic theses or dissertations
Studies examining how reader-response approach was implemented in terms of pedagogical practices and selection of texts	Studies not addressing reader-response theory's application in pedagogical practices and text selection, or those focusing on alternative literary theories and educational frameworks
Narrative texts, such as novels, picture books and short stories	Not focused on narrative texts
In the context of language, literature, or language arts classes	Not focused on language, literature, or language arts classes
Full text available	Full text not available

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram.



An overview of research designs, contexts and text types, and benefits of reader-response approach for aesthetic engagement are presented in Table 2. In this review, the methodologies of the included studies were initially categorized as either those used for assessments of aesthetic engagement and those involving a pedagogical intervention in a loose sense. The former category comprised four quantitative correlational studies that implemented exposure to varied text types or discussion prompts to collect data for the study. The latter category, referred to as pedagogical studies, was broadly defined to encompass the remaining 35 studies. These studies included two quantitative experimental studies, one survey study and one mixed-methods study, and 31 qualitative case studies. To provide a more granular snapshot of the included literature, the 39 studies were further categorized by their specific research design and participant grade level (Table 3). The methodologies were overwhelmingly qualitative (n=31), with a primary focus on case study designs (n=18). The remaining qualitative studies (n=13) employed other

qualitative designs, such as descriptive, ethnographic, or action research methodologies. Quantitative designs (n=7) were less common, split between the four correlational studies, two experimental or quasi-experimental studies, and a single survey study. Only one study used a mixed-methods approach. The review corpus showed a slight preference for primary/elementary education, with 22 studies focused on Grades 1-6 and 14 studies on secondary participants; the total exceeds the study count, reflecting the inclusion of three mixed-level designs. Geographically, the literature was heavily concentrated in North America, with the USA contributing the majority of studies (n=27) and Canada contributing a significant portion (n=7). The remaining studies (n=5) were conducted in the UK (n=2), a Palestinian village in Israel (n=1), and Korean Heritage Language schools (n=2).

4.3 Data analysis

PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were employed to identify recurrent themes in the selected studies. The coding process for this review was primarily inductive and iterative and represented a hybrid approach (simultaneously theory- and data-driven analysis; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The authors collaborated for an initial analysis of 10 articles to identify emerging themes regarding pedagogical practices, text types, and the perceived benefits of the reader-response approach. Based on the emerging themes, a coding framework was developed to ensure consistent and comprehensive data analyses for each research question. The codes for the first research question were literature discussions, free response writing, modality practices, and read-aloud, for the second research question the codes were multimodal, realistic fiction, multicultural literature, horror or gothic literature, historical fiction, humorous fiction, fables and folk tale and film and for third research question the codes included personal connections, deeper engagement, better personal and literary understanding, student-centeredness and personal interpretation, demonstrations of the social nature of reading, empathy and cultural understanding, and development of identity and self-awareness .

The analysis of the data was implemented in several phases and was carried out as an in-depth hermeneutic cycle, in which interpretations were constructed through a cycle of individual examinations of the data and joint discussions (Gadamer, 2004). The analyses progressed in two phases: At first, the first author implemented the data analyses with the coding framework and formed the interpretations based on the data. Next, the analyses and the interpretations were discussed among all the authors to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the data. This researcher triangulation (Torrance, 2012) opened up the possibility of alternative interpretations, refined interpretations, and strengthened the reliability of (Barbour, 2001; MacLure, 2013). As a final phase of the analyses, the third author reviewed 20% of all the classifications and coding to ensure consistency in the analysis. The

authors discussed the classifications, interpretations, and the relationships between them to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflected the content of the data.

Table 2. Overview of the Included Studies.

No.	Author and Year	Participants, primary research design, type of empirical data, method of analysis and text types.	Benefits of reader-response approach and text selection for literary engagement
1	(Eeds & Wells, 1989)	15 fifth- and sixth-graders Qualitative (Naturalistic Study) Transcriptions of audiotapes of individual sessions Teacher journals Data driven content analysis 4 children's/YA novels (2 fantasy, 2 realistic fiction)	Through the interaction of text and readers, as well as its group critique, transaction, meaning, and understanding were generated.
2	(Many, 1991)	130 participants: 43 fourth-graders, 47 sixth-graders, and 40 eighth-graders Quantitative (Correlational) Free written response to stories Coding utilized Cox and Many's (1989) instrument Realistic short stories	The aesthetic stance contributed to higher levels of understanding. Grade level did not influence the relationship between the aesthetic stance and higher levels.
3	(Cox & Many, 1992)	38 fifth-graders Quantitative (Correlational) Free written responses Data driven coding informed by Rosenblatt Nine works of realistic fiction: four novels (print) and five films	Aesthetic stance contributed to higher levels of understanding. Students tended to read books more aesthetically than they view films.
4	(Many & Wiseman, 1992)	120 third-graders Quantitative (Experimental, Intervention research) Scripted lesson designs and discussions Free written response Coding (adapted from Cox and Many, 1992) Picture books (traditional folk tale based childrens' literature)	When students, through instruction, were encouraged to respond personally to texts, it deepened their aesthetic engagement with the materials.
5	(Many, 1992)	130 participants: 43 fourth-graders, 47 sixth-graders, and 40 eighth-graders Quantitative (Correlational) Free written response Statistical analysis (clustering, variance) Three realistic short stories	Realistic short stories due to a relatable plot were found to exert a main effect on how students assumed an aesthetic stance. An aesthetic stance led to higher levels of personal understanding of the texts.

6	(Altieri, 1995)	240 fifth- and seventh-graders Quantitative (Correlational) Free written response Coding (based on Wiseman et al., 1992) Statistical analysis of covariance, Bonferoni post-hoc multiple comparison. Multicultural realistic literature	Neither the author's culture, nor that of the reader, interfered with aesthetic response. Text preference was related to aesthetic stance.
7	(Villaume & Hopkins, 1995)	Five fourth-graders Qualitative (Case Study) Videotaped group discussions Vignettes from multiple reviews of the videotapes and from typescripts Coding and analysis based on quality and frequence of interaction Realistic fiction (two novels)	Students' responses were affected by the responses of other individuals participating in the discussion and other books and movies they already encountered.
8	(Many et al., 1996)	137 third-graders Quantitative (Experimental, Intervention research) Whole class, small group discussion and written responses, sharing, read aloud Classification/Coding (adapted from Cox and Many, 1992) 6 levels of aesthetic complexity Picture books	Students adopted aesthetic vs. efferent stances in their responses to teachers' prompts and literary approaches. They were more likely to take an aesthetic stance when they were allowed to give a free response
9	(Becker, 1999)	Four fifth-graders Qualitative (Case Study) Observations, videotapes/transcripts of discussions and activities, student worksheets, and written responses Patterns of student-generated stances and responses Fables	Students accessed shifts in reading stance, with the discussion group context offering cues for an aesthetic stance.
10	(Chandler, 1999)	One 11th-grader Qualitative (Case Study) Open-ended interviews: transcripts and fieldnotes Inductive approaches to data analysis Stephen King novel (horror fiction)	Popular fiction and classic texts were worthy of being included in language arts classes and had the capacity to engage students. Students like Catherine required a certain amount of scaffolding to make lived-through transactions with texts.
11	(Sipe, 2000)	26 first- and second-graders Qualitative (Descriptive) Field notes, transcript audiotapes of read-aloud sessions Grounded theory approach, categorizing verbal responses into types of literary understanding	The pedagogical practices (read-aloud session) and careful text selection led to enhanced literary understanding among young students. The richest literary understanding included both

		(a) fairy and folk tales; (b) contemporary realistic fiction; (c) contemporary fantasies Picture storybooks	personal and analytical components.
12	(Broughton, 2002)	Four sixth-graders Qualitative (Ethnographic) Classroom observation, recorded conversations, interviews, dialogue journals, book club discussions Qualitative coding, triangulation of data, reflexivity, peer debriefing, and member checks Multicultural literature (Lupita Mañana novel)	The study explored the performance and construction of subjectivities of four early adolescent sixth-grade girls engaged in book club discussions. Focusing on their social interactions and experiences with a novel about two Mexican children who migrate to America, it analyzes how these interactions and experiences contribute to the girls' personal and social identity constructions.
13	(Dressel, 2005)	123 eighth-graders Qualitative Pre- and postunit surveys on attitudes and knowledge, the Book Club organizer (BCO), and the dialogue journal (DJ). Multicultural literature (novels)	Aesthetic stance contributed to higher levels of understanding, but the students adhered to their own values and norms when the ideas offered in the novels clashed with their own.
14	(Onofrey, 2006)	Five sixth-graders Qualitative (Case Study) Semi structured interviews, audiotaped and videotaped literature circle discussions. Thematic analysis Humorous literature	Utilizing Rosenblatt's (1995) reader-response transactional theory, the research focused on how students perceive and discuss humor within the narrative context. The study investigated how humor impacts reader engagement and aids in the comprehension of character development. The use of humor in the texts facilitated understanding of characters, enhancing students' ability to make personal connections and engage critically with the literature.
15	(Parsons, 2006)	10 fourth-graders Qualitative (Case Study) Analysis of students' memory stories, group discussions, and visual representations Thematic coding of memory	Visualization techniques facilitated a deeper, more immersive reading experience, allowing readers to "live through" the story.

		Varied, with an emphasis on novels conducive to rich visualization	
16	(Raines et al., 2007)	84 ninth- through 12th-graders Quantitative (Survey study) Instructional interventions Open-ended questionnaire. Survey; Teale-Lewis Reading Attitude Scale (1980), Chi-square nonparametric test/A logistic regression Short stories	The study compared two distinct instructional lessons: one promoting an aesthetic stance (through discussion of personal experience) and one promoting an efferent stance (through recall questions). A statistically significant majority of students (60.72%) preferred the instructional method that promoted an aesthetic stance.
17	(Fecho & Amatucci, 2008)	One adolescent and his teacher Qualitative (Case Study) Interviews, classroom observations, email vignettes, and students' writings Thematic analysis YA realistic fiction (Rainbow Boys)	The transactions between Andy and his teacher, Krist, enhanced his self-perception as a reader and writer, as well as his identity as a gay teenager.
18	(Larson, 2009)	26 fifth-graders Qualitative (Case Study) Digital voice recordings, extensive field notes, student interviews, electronic journals, online message board transcripts Inductive analysis of online discussion transcripts and electronic journals Historical fiction	An asynchronous online literature discussion encouraged students to respond deeply to the literature and share their ideas with others.
19	(Flint, 2010)	20 first-graders Qualitative (Practitioner Research, Grounded Theory) Classroom observations, video and audio recordings, student interviews Thematic analysis and triangulation of observation notes Voluntary books	Social interactions and literary transactions during buddy reading sessions empowered young readers, fostering literacy and enhancing reading strategies, comprehension, and motivation through cooperative engagement.
20	(Schieble, 2010)	Eight high school students (adolescents) Qualitative (Case Study) Online postings, reflective papers, teaching journals, focus groups, and interviews Constant comparative method with both deductive and inductive coding Young adult novel about a transgendered teen	The pre-service teachers' framing of questions about the book led adolescents to adopt an aesthetic stance, focusing on personal emotional responses rather than critical analysis. However, it often resulted in othering the transgender character.

21	(Pilonieta & Hancock, 2012)	68 first-graders Mixed Methods Thematic analysis and correlation Students completed a brief assessment All four classes were video-taped during the read-aloud Multicultural texts	Urban first-graders related to literature reflecting their experiences, including sensitive content. Comprehension correlated with an aesthetic reading stance.
22	(Pantaleo, 2012)	60 seventh-graders Qualitative Students' written responses, classroom discussions, and activities focused on reading and analyzing Picture books	The students' responses reflected adoption of an aesthetic stance and aesthetic attitude toward *The Red Tree*.
23	(Parsons, 2013)	10 fourth-graders Qualitative (Intrinsic Case Study) Memory stories, visual representations, and group discussions Thematic analysis Fiction	Fourth-graders formed emotional connections with literary characters using reader-response and simulation theories. Children's use of metaphors illustrated their personal reader identities and relationships with characters, highlighting the importance of an aesthetic stance in reading activities.
24	(Pantaleo, 2013)	One fourth-grader Qualitative (Case Study) Students' written responses, discussions, design projects, interviews, and questionnaires Picture books, graphic novels, and magazines, with a specific emphasis on *The Arrival*	Instruction on visual elements and diverse panel layouts enriched students' aesthetic responses. Anike's written responses reveal how *The Arrival* inspired her both intellectually and emotionally. Her work meets the criteria of an 'aesthetic response to literature' explicated by Soter et al. (2010): 'a sense of the work as well as one's response to it'; 'an appreciation of the craft of the work'; 'interaction between the perceived and the perceiver'; [and] 'engagement with the work' (p. 214).
25	(Wissman & Costello, 2014)	Four eighth-graders Qualitative (Case study) Classroom observations, interviews with students and teacher, student-created scripts and comics Grounded theory and multimodal data analysis Novel	In "aesthetic digital composing in response to literature," students used various digital and cultural tools to convey moods or themes from literature, which led to a broadening of aesthetic engagement (p. 114).

26	(Charlton et al., 2014)	58 fifth- and sixth-graders Qualitative (Interpretive Case Study) Classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, children's written texts, and maps Thematic analysis Picture book	Text and activities promoted text-to-child aesthetic transactions and increased children's sense of place.
27	(Pantaleo, 2014)	23 seventh-graders Qualitative (Case Study) Content analysis Written responses, discussions, student projects, interviews, questionnaires Content analysis Graphic novels	Visual art education can boost aesthetic engagement with texts.
28	(McLean & Rowsell, 2015)	Four 10th- and 11th-graders Qualitative Student artifacts (photographs, written compositions), interviews, classroom observations, and reflections Thematic analysis Narrative texts and photography	Aesthetic transactions and meanings were constructed by responding to narrative texts, but images were used instead of printed texts.
29	(Kesler et al. 2016)	28 fifth-graders Qualitative (Participatory Action Research) Field notes, reflective journal, audio/video recordings, student artifacts (digital stories, storyboards), interviews (teacher & student). Multimodal analysis, intertextual analysis, grounded theory, collaborative coding. Historical Fiction Novels	Students expressed deep and nuanced interpretations of their novels through their digital stories, effectively using non-textual modes like music, sound effects, and images to convey mood, theme, and character motivation.
30	(Del Nero, 2017)	Eight participants from an accelerated seventh-grade English language arts (ELA) class; four females and four males all age 12 Qualitative (Case Study) Field notes, interview transcripts, student artifacts Thematic analysis Gothic literature	The Gothic unit provided a rich and meaningful learning experience for all eight participants, fostering their academic, social, and personal growth through the diverse aesthetic transactions they engaged in during the unit.
31	(Lysaker & Nie, 2017)	One fifth-grader Qualitative (Clinical Case Study) Audio recordings of retellings, interviews Microethnographic discourse analysis, focusing on narrative coherence and social imagination Picture book	Using illustrations for retelling promoted deeper, more aesthetic engagement. John's retelling with illustrations demonstrated a connection with the story's social dynamics and various character perspectives.

			Without illustrations, John's approach was more efferent, mainly summarizing the story.
32	(Pantaleo, 2017)	Seven seventh-graders Qualitative (Case Study) Student interviews, graphic narratives created by students, discussions, and written responses. Content analysis Picture books and graphic novels	Learning about the what, why, and how of paneling affected the composing of their work and adopting a predominantly aesthetic stance.
33	(Del Nero, 2018)	Eight students, comprising four boys and four girls Qualitative Pre-, during, and post-unit interviews, analyses of student-created artifacts (e.g., artwork, journal entries, digital content), and classroom observations Thematic analysis Gothic fiction	By focusing on aesthetic engagement and minimizing informational questions, students connected the literature to their lives for deeper understanding. of themselves and the world around them.
34	(Wissman, 2018)	22 fifth-graders Qualitative (Case Study) Classroom observations and transcripts, student work, interviews with the teacher (Simeen), and documents from her teacher inquiry group Constant-comparative method (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) Multicultural literature (on the theme of living in a foreign country, different time period, fiction & non-fiction: childrens' novels, short stories, picture books)	The study employed three central pedagogical moves: (1) Inviting aesthetic transactions by repeatedly asking students, "What are you thinking?" to elicit their initial, lived-through responses; (2) Privileging multiple perspectives by using multigenre text sets on complex topics like migration; and (3) Calling attention to language choices as a line of inquiry. The study used students' initial aesthetic responses as the starting point for critical conversations that disturb their assumptions and foster empathy.
35	(Del Nero, 2020)	One seventh-grader (in a group) Qualitative (Case Study) Field notes, artifacts, and post-unit interview(s) Thematic analysis of the aesthetic transaction Gothic literature	Ray, a student previously labeled as "lazy," demonstrated deep engagement with Gothic texts through numerous aesthetic transactions, highlighting this genre's potential to foster personal, social, and global insights.

36	(Hayik,2022)	10 ninth-graders Qualitative (Action Research) Videotaped class sessions (transcribed), students' oral and written responses, follow-up videotaped reflections. Content analysis of oral and written data, coding for prevalent themes. Social-issue Picture Books (Piggybook)	The researcher read a picture book that challenges gender stereotypes aloud and invited students to transact with it. Their transactions with the text, each other, and the researcher as their teacher contributed to generating aesthetic reader responses.
37	(Scherer ,2022)	30 primary students (ages 6-7) Qualitative (Ethnography) Participant observation, interviews, and children's drawings with accompanying commentary. Thematic analysis (grounded theory approach), analysis of a "critical incident." To heal a Broken wing	The reader-response approach is highly effective at engaging students labeled as "poor readers" by validating their "funds of knowledge" from home and personal life. It allows students to construct and perform identities where they feel competent and successful, moving beyond their school-based label and offering a more holistic view of the child as a reader and person.
38	(Lee, 2024a)	6 second-graders (Korean-English bilingual) Qualitative (Discourse Analysis) Audio-recordings of classroom discourse and semi-structured student interviews. Discourse Analysis Wordless Picturebooks	The study was guided by Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader-Response Theory, focusing on the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the visual "text" of the picturebook. It examined how students bring their unique experiences and prior knowledge to interpret the images and construct a narrative. The core practice was interactive shared reading, where the teacher facilitated discussion with guiding questions to encourage close analysis of visual narratives.
39	(Lee 2024b)	6 first-graders (Korean-English bilingual) Qualitative (Discourse Analysis) Audio-recordings of classroom discourse and semi-structured student interviews. Discourse Analysis: Inductive coding of transcripts to identify comprehension strategies and functions of	This study's unique framework integrates Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory with a heteroglossic perspective on translanguaging. The researcher posited that bilingual individuals utilize a single, integrated linguistic system to construct meaning. By examining how students

	translanguaging. Wordless Picturebook (I Am Here)	transact with visual images, the study highlights their fluid use of both Korean and English to make meaning. The findings indicate that students used a variety of comprehension strategies beyond simple visualization, such as activating prior knowledge, making connections, predicting, and inferring

Table 3. Descriptive snapshot of included studies (N = 39).

Category	Sub-category	Count (*n*)	Percentage (%)
Research design			
	Qualitative (Total)	31	79.5%
	↳ Case Study (and its variants)	18	46.2%
	↳ Other Qualitative Designs	13	33.3%
	Quantitative (Total)	7	17.9%
	↳ Correlational (''Non-intervention'')	4	10.3%
	↳ Experimental/Quasi-experimental	2	5.1%
	↳ Survey study	1	2.6%
	Mixed Methods	1	2.6%
Participant Level			
	Primary (Grades 1-6)	22	56.4%
	Secondary (Grades 7-12)	14	35.9%
	Mixed (Spanning Primary & Secondary)	3	7.7%
Regions			
	USA	27	69.2%
	Canada	7	17.9%
	UK	2	5.1%
	Palestinian village, Israel	1	2.6%
	Korean Heritage Language (KHL) schools...	2	5.1%

5. RESULTS

5.1 Pedagogical practices to enhance aesthetic reading

The analyses revealed four primary pedagogical practices, which were implemented to promote aesthetic reading in classrooms. These pedagogical practices (N=72) were literature discussions (n=29); free response or creative writing (n=18), reading modality practices (n=16) and read-aloud practices (n=9). In most studies, more than one pedagogical practice was used, and free response or creative writing was connected to another pedagogical practice with no exception. The pedagogical practices and studies implementing them are presented in Table 4. Articles categorized in more than one category are in italics.

Table 4. Summary of pedagogical practices and corresponding studies.

Pedagogical practices	Studies
Literature discussions	*Becker, 1999; Broughton, 2002; Chandler, 1999; Charlton et al., 2014; Del Nero, 2017, 2018, 2020; Dressel, 2005; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Fecho & Amatucci, 2008; Flint, 2010; Hayik, 2022; Kesler et al., 2016; Larson, 2009; Lee, 2024a; Lee, 2024b; Many & Wiseman, 1992; Many et al., 1996; McLean & Rowsell, 2015; Onofrey, 2006; Pantaleo, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017; Parsons, 2006, 2013; Raines et al., 2007; Schieble, 2010; Villaume & Hopkins, 1995; Wissman 2018*
Free response writing and creative writing	Altieri, 1995**;** *Becker, 1999; Broughton, 2002; Charlton et al., 2014;* Cox & Many, 1992**;** *Del Nero, 2017, 2018, 2020; Dressel, 2005; Many et al., 1996***;** Many, 1991, 1992**;** *McLean & Rowsell, 2015; Pantaleo, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017; Scherer, 2022*
Reading modality practices	*Becker, 1999; Charlton et al., 2014; Del Nero, 2017, 2020; Kesler et al. (2016);* Lysaker & Nie, 2017; *McLean & Rowsell, 2015; Pantaleo, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017; Parsons, 2006, 2013; Raines et al., 2007; Scherer, 2022;* Wissman & Costello, 2014
Read-aloud sessions	*Broughton, 2002; Lee, 2024a; Lee, 2024b; Many et al., 1996; Onofrey, 2006; Parsons, 2006;* Pilonieta & Hancock, 2012; Sipe, 2000; Wissman, 2018

5.1.1 Literature discussion

Literature discussions were employed to enhance engagement with literature and investigate how the classroom discussion influenced student responses in the efferent-aesthetic spectrum. For example, the studies by Many et al. (1996), Many and Wiseman (1992), and Raines et al. (2007) showed how moving the focus of discussions from analytical to more experiential, led to more lived-trough personally involved and complex responses as well as enhanced the aesthetic experience.

In general, there are some pedagogical concerns in literature discussions. One of them is the risk of marginalizing quieter students (Galton et al., 2008) and creating a silent majority whose personal responses are not heard. While this is a valid pedagogical concern, it seems that the pedagogical instruction in this data strived to include every student by combining the whole class discussions with individual or partner activities (Many et al., 1996; Raines et al., 2007). A modern adaptation of a participatory activity was the use of asynchronous online forums, which gave the students a forum to participate in a more multimodal manner, gave them more time

to respond and led to more equitable and thoughtful contributions (Larson, 2009; Schieble, 2010).

In most pedagogical studies, the discussions were student-led small groups discussions (e.g. Broughton, 2002; Del Nero, 2017; Eeds & Wells, 1989) which aimed to foster interpretive freedom and the social construction of meaning. This strive was noticeable in almost all pedagogical studies, starting with the very first study by Eeds and Wells (1989). In their article, they investigated how small, student-led groups can support the so called "grand conversations" where the students collaboratively built meaning, share personal stories, and interpret the texts without teacher guidance and questions. The emphasis on encouraging student to share their reading experiences with each other was especially strong in Flint's (2010) study illustrating an instructional practice with first graders. In that study, the students tested an application of peer reading called "buddy reading" and scaffolded their interpretations of literature through talk and play. Further, Kesler et al. (2016) found that collaborative book clubs fostered deep comprehension and a sense of community through shared evaluation and problem-solving, particularly when a multimodal response medium was used.

Although most of the studies focused on the small group discussions, the data also included instructional practices that developed teacher-led discussions. For example, Hayik (2022) demonstrated, how teacher-facilitated, critical discussions around emancipatory texts may empower marginalized voices to challenge traditional social norms. The teachers may have strong position as a facilitator or co-participant who guides the discussion without dominating. For example, Del Nero (2018) and Broughton (2002) investigated how minimizing factual questions enhanced students' personal connections and aesthetic responses to literature, and Lee (2024a) and Lee (2024b) tested interactive reading sessions with guiding questions to visual narratives and to encourage translanguaging practices.

5.1.2 Free response writing and creative writing

Different approaches to writing were among the key pedagogical practices. It seemed that individual writing practices positioned students as active composers, who used literary works to deepen their aesthetic response. The most common writing practice was a free written response, where the students were encouraged to write anything they wanted about a narrative (e.g. Many et al., 1996; Many & Wiseman, 1992). This free response writing was also implemented in all the quantitative correlational studies to capture an unfiltered view of a reader's stance, revealing that an aesthetic focus often correlates with higher levels of personal understanding and interpretation (Altieri, 1995; Cox & Many, 1992; Many, 1991, 1992).

Also, more structured writing practices, such as dialogue journals, poems and digital storytelling, were employed to guide the aesthetic response. Dressel (2005) tested dialogue journals to invite the students to empathize with someone's position

in the text, to relate to an alternate worldview or to deepen the feelings of empathy. Later studies expanded this practice towards more creative applications. For instance, in Del Nero´s (2017) study, the students composed poems to explore Gothic tropes and in Charlton et al. (2014) study the students wrote narratives on their place-related identities.

Alongside written responses, the classroom practices connected writing practices to other modalities and digital storytelling. For example, Scherer (2022) used a creative visual response method with emergent readers and highlighted how creative writing and art can serve as a bridge to deep meaning-making.

5.1.3 Reading modality practices

Reading modality practices refer to modal switching and practices that are moving between different modes of meaning-making, such as from written text to visual image or digital compositions (McLean & Rowsell, 2015). In the studies, reading modality practices were manifested, for example, via digital comics (Wissman & Costello, 2014), photographic essays (McLean & Rowsell, 2015) and drawings of visual metaphors (Parsons, 2006, 2013).

Many of these studies also selected multimodal texts. In a study by Lysaker and Nie (2017) picture book's illustrations were implemented to scaffold and aid students' oral retelling which resulted in a deeper, more aesthetic engagement with the text. Similarly, Pantaleo's (2014, 2017) studies demonstrated how explicit instruction in the visual language of graphic novels provided students with the tools to analyze a text's multimodal design and enhanced their aesthetic appreciation.

It seems that one of the aims of these practices was to enable students to draw on their out-of-school literacies and funds of knowledge, leading to highly engaged and nuanced forms of aesthetic response (e.g. Wissman & Costello, 2014). Scherer (2022) also found that visual response methods, like drawing, provided an authentic view on a child as a competent meaning-maker, particularly for those labeled as weak readers. Further, Kesler et al. (2016) employed multimodal practices by scaffolding tools like storyboards.

5.1.4 Read-aloud practices

The primary aim of teacher read-aloud practices, when guided by a transactional approach, was to establish a shared narrative foundation, enable educators to model aesthetic engagement, and explicitly elicit student responses, thereby fostering a sense of community (Parsons, 2006; Wissman, 2018). A key feature of these practices seemed to be in interactivity. For example, Sipe (2000) described a read aloud practice during which students were allowed freely express their personal connections and interpretations with the text.

The analyses of the data indicated that read-aloud practices are particularly effective when the texts are culturally relevant or dealt with sensitive social issues,

like racism, homelessness, parental incarceration. This was apparent in Pilonieta and Hancock's (2012) study which showed that read-aloud with a culturally relevant text encouraged students to make personal connections with the text. Furthermore, these sessions were often used to scaffold different ways of responding to a text. Parsons (2006) described the read-aloud as a tool for children to create and enter a story world. Additionally, Wissman (2018) detailed how read-alouds of global literature invited students' aesthetic transactions and then implemented these aesthetic responses as a springboard for critical conversations about language, power, and perspective.

5.2 Text choices to enhance aesthetic reading

In the data, there was considerably more variation in text choices than in pedagogical practices and it seems that text choice was considered meaningful when investigating the aesthetic reading. Only two studies (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Flint, 2010) did not specify the text type employed in the study, and in several studies the text choice could be categorized in more than one category.

Due to the analyses of text choices (N=44) the articles were placed in seven categories which represented different genres or text types: multimodal texts (n=17); realistic fiction (n=7); multicultural literature (n=9); horror or gothic literature (n=4); fables and folk tales (n=3); historical fiction (n=3); humorous fiction (n=1) and film (n=1). The non-experimental/correlational studies used several text types: In Altieri's (1995) study they tried out a text that could be categorized as realistic and multicultural fiction, Cox and Many (1992) implemented realistic fiction, which also had multimodal features, and in the two studies by Many (1991, 1992) realistic fiction was implemented. In table 5 the articles of the data are categorized based on the text type or genre. Studies categorized under multiple text types are in italics.

Table 5. Categories of text choices and corresponding studies.

Genre/Type	Studies
Multimodal texts	*Charlton et al., 2014; Cox & Many, 1992; Hayik, 2022; Lee, 2024a; 2024b; Lysaker & Nie, 2017; Many & Wiseman, 1992; Many et al., 1996; McLean & Rowsell, 2015; Pantaleo, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017; Scherer, 2022; Sipe, 2000; Wissman, 2018; Wissman & Costello, 2014*
Realistic fiction	*Altieri, 1995; Cox & Many, 1992; Many, 1991, 1992; Raines et al., 2007; Sipe, 2000; Villaume & Hopkins, 1995*

Multicultural literature	*Altieri, 1995; Broughton, 2002; Dressel, 2005; Hayik, 2022; Many et al., 1996; Pantaleo 2013; Pilonieta & Hancock, 2012; Schieble, 2010; Wissman, 2018*
Horror or gothic literature	*Chandler, 1999; Del Nero, 2017, 2018, 2020*
Historical fiction	*Kesler et al., 2016; Larson, 2009; McLean & Rowsell, 2015*
Humorous fiction	*Onofrey, 2006*
Fables and folk tale	*Becker, 1999; Many & Wiseman, 1992; Sipe, 2000*
Film	*Cox and Many (1992)*

5.2.1 Multimodal texts

Multimodal texts were implemented most often. The category included picturebooks, graphic novels, and digital compositions, all of which integrated visual and textual elements (about multimodal texts see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) and communicated by images, color, symbols and layout (Lee, 2024a, 2024b). It seemed that texts with multimodality were chosen to support comprehension and immersion to the narrative. For example, Lysaker and Nie (2017) found that illustrations enable students to create a deeper and more relational understanding of the text, and Sipe (2000) highlighted the significance of illustrations as a tool to aid narrative comprehension and social imagination. Further, multimodality enhanced students' emotional attachment to the text and encouraged the students' to be more active. Pantaleo took benefit from multimodal texts in both of her studies. In her study from year 2012, she used an allegorical picture book (Shaun Tan: The Red Tree 2001) to promote aesthetic reading stance and as a medium to explore and interpret emotional landscapes and textual fragments. In his other study (2013) she investigated students' visual meaning-making skills via a wordless multicultural graphic novel (Shaun Tan: The Arrival 2010). In the study, the students demonstrated how they can engage as co-authors and construct meaning through their own interpretations.

The benefits of multimodal texts were recognized trough out the time span of the data as also more recent studies by Scherer (2022) and Lee (2024a; 2024b) highlighted the compliance of wordless picturebooks in enhancing aesthetic reading. Lee (2024a) demonstrated how different genres naturally elicit different comprehension strategies and Lee (2024b) found that a wordless format can validate and promote bilingual students' translanguaging practices. In the study, wordless format provided a natural space for them to translanguage (mix Korean and English) for various functions, such as for faster lexical access, elaboration, expressing emotions, and constructing their identity as fluent bilinguals.

5.2.2 Relatable and current texts

Cox and Many (1992) as well as Many (1991, 1992) employed realistic fiction with upper elementary and middle school students and found it appropriate for examining both aesthetic and efferent responses. According to Many (1992) realistic short stories fostered an aesthetic reading stance due to their relatable plots and Cox and Many (1992b) chose for their study nine texts of realistic fiction, (e.g. Byars: The Summer of the Swans 1970. Cox and Many (1992) also used a film (e.g. Silver: The Case of the Elevator Duck 1974) alongside the more traditional verbal texts to allow for diverse interpretations and promote emotional and imaginative connections with the stories.

In the data, multicultural literature was especially chosen in the studies aiming to address social and cultural diversity and deepen students' understanding and empathy. Wissman (2018) used global literature to foster critical thinking and empathy among white, upper-middle-class students. In his study, diverse texts and focusing on language choices strived to deepen the understanding of global context and enhanced the awareness of language's role in constructing reality. Further, Hayik (2022) demonstrated how social-issue picture books can create critical dialogues on social justice and challenge traditional gender roles in a Palestinian-Israeli classroom.

The text choices that concentrated on students' reading interests outside of school emphasized horror and Gothic literature. In a study by Del Nero (2020), he used Gothic literature to engage students' diverse interests and foster deeper emotional connections and in another study by Del Nero (2017), he employed texts by Shelley and Poe to align with students' developmental stage. According to Del Nero, despite of students varied backgrounds, they were able to form aesthetic connections with the Gothic texts as those texts often reveal shared and topical themes for adolescent, such as normalcy concerns and powerlessness. He also stated that by examining complex themes (e.g. imaginative contrasts, meaningful connections, concerns about normalcy, powerlessness, and fear) in Gothic literature fostered deeper emotional connections and aesthetic engagement.

In addition, historical fiction and folktales were chosen for the texts in the classroom practices. In a study by Onofrey (2006) the text choice focused on humor as he thought it to captivate students' interest and transform reading to a more enjoyable activity. Becker (1999) and Sipe (2000) chose to implement fables and folk tales. For example, Becker (1999) selected a folk tale called Androcles and the Lion for its thematic relevance. In a study by Larson (2009) historical fiction on American Civil Rights Movement was implemented to motivate the reading by aligning the texts with social studies curriculum. According to his study, quality historical fiction might bring history to life, connect reading with students on a personal level and elicit aesthetic and efferent responses. In studies by Kestler et al. (2016) and Charlton et al. (2014) historical fiction was implemented to other purposes. In Kestler et al. (2016) study a text-heavy historical fiction novel was implemented in a digital storytelling projects and Charlton et al. (2014) chose to use My Place (Wheatley &

Rawlins, 2008) for its unique narrative structure and thematic focus on place and invited students to reflect on their own place-related identities (Charlton et al., 2014).

5.3 The perceived benefits of reader-response for aesthetic engagement

When investigating the perceived benefits (N=107) of reader-response pedagogy for literary engagement seven primary themes were identified: fostering personal connections to the text (n=28); promoting deeper engagement (n=27); enhancing personal and literary understanding (n=14); emphasizing student-centeredness and personal interpretation (n=15); highlighting the social nature of reading (n=10); cultivating empathy and cultural understanding (n=8); and contributing to the development of identity and self-awareness (n=5). In the analyses these themes were grouped into two main dimensions: personal engagement as well as social and cultural dimensions of reading. Almost without exceptions (Many & Wiseman, 1992 and Flint, 2010) all the studies informed about more than one perceived benefit. It was noteworthy that in most cases the data were based on student-reported experiences or observed student outcomes, as the data collection methods employed student interviews, written responses, and direct observation of their students' engagement. The themes of perceived benefits and the studies associated with them are presented in Table 6. Studies categorized under multiple themes are in italics.

Table 6. Summary of identified themes and corresponding studies.

Theme	Studies
Personal connections to the text	*Altieri, 1995; Becker, 1999; Broughton, 2002; Chandler, 1999; Charlton et al., 2014; Cox & Many, 1992; Del Nero, 2017, 2018, 2020; Dressel, 2005; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Fecho & Amatucci, 2008; Larson, 2009; Lee, 2024b; Many, 1991, 1992; McLean & Rowsell, 2015; Onofrey, 2006; Pantaleo, 2012; Parsons, 2006, 2013; Pilonieta & Hancock, 2012; Raines et al., 2007; Scherer, 2022; Schieble, 2010; Sipe, 2000; Villaume & Hopkins, 1995; Wissman & Costello, 2014*
Deeper engagement	*Altieri, 1995; Chandler, 1999; Charlton et al., 2014; Cox & Many, 1992; Del Nero, 2017, 2020; Dressel, 2005; Fecho & Amatucci, 2008; Kesler et al., 2016; Lee, 2024a; Lysaker & Nie, 2017; Many, 1991, 1992; Many & Wiseman, 1992; McLean & Rowsell, 2015; Onofrey, 2006; Pantaleo, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017; Parsons, 2006, 2013; Raines et al., 2007; Scherer, 2022; Sipe, 2000; Villaume & Hopkins, 1995; Wissman & Costello, 2014*

Better personal and literary understanding	*Cox & Many, 1992; Dressel, 2005; Kesler et al., 2016; Lysaker & Nie, 2017; Lee, 2024a; Many, 1991, 1992; Onofrey, 2006; Pantaleo, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017; Parsons, 2006; Pilonieta & Hancock, 2012*
Student-centeredness and personal interpretation	*Becker, 1999; Chandler, 1999; Del Nero, 2017, 2020; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Hayik, 2022; Kesler et al., 2016; Larson, 2009; Lee, 2024b; Pantaleo, 2012, 2013; Parsons, 2006; Raines et al., 2007; Villaume & Hopkins, 1995; Wissman & Costello, 2014.*
Demonstrations of the social nature of reading	*Becker, 1999; Broughton, 2002; Del Nero, 2017; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Fecho & Amatucci, 2008; Flint, 2010; Kesler et al., 2016; Larson, 2009; Onofrey, 2006; Villaume & Hopkins, 1995*
Empathy and cultural understanding	*Altieri, 1995; Broughton, 2002; Del Nero, 2018; Dressel, 2005; Hayik, 2022; Pilonieta & Hancock, 2012; Schieble, 2010; Wissman, 2018*
Development of identity and self-awareness	*Broughton, 2002; Charlton et al., 2014; Del Nero, 2017; Fecho & Amatucci, 2008; Hayik, 2022*

5.3.1 The dimension of personal engagement

The most predominant theme identified in the data was strengthening the personal connections—life stories, emotions and experiences—to the texts. These personal experiences concentrated on different aspects of life, like grief (Del Nero, 2017), heritage or home experiences (Charlton et al., 2014) and liminality (Del Nero, 2018). In a study by Parsons (2013) the personal connection was created in three distinct ways: positioning oneself next to the character, interacting with the character, or imaginatively becoming the character. According to Scheible (2010) the key instructional strategy was facilitating text-to-self connections.

According to over half of the studies the personal connections to the text fostered deeper engagement with the texts allowing students to identify more with characters and immerse themselves in the texts. This engagement was often facilitated with visual and creative response modes, including metaphors or multimodal projects (Pantaleo, 2013; Parsons, 2006, 2013; Wissman & Costello, 2014) and it resulted in adopting aesthetic stance (e.g., Pantaleo, 2017) and engagement (e.g., Parsons, 2013) or exhibiting aesthetic responses (e.g., Pantaleo, 2013) and attitudes (e.g., Pantaleo, 2012). In several studies (Becker, 1999; Cox & Many, 1992; Dressel, 2005; Many, 1991) the engagement via personal connections was illustrated as “a lived-through experience" or "living inside the story" and students reportedly linked textual elements—such as characters, events, settings, or themes—to their own lives, memories, feelings, and experiences.

Based on the analyses it seems that personal engagement was achieved via student-centered approaches and the emphasis was on creating possibilities for

personal interpretations enhanced by student agency, choice, and voice (e.g., Becker, 1999; Chandler, 1999; Del Nero, 2017, 2020; Larson, 2009; Raines et al., 2007). Student-centeredness was approached in several phases of pedagogical studies as it included allowing students to choose the texts (Chandler, 1999; Del Nero, 2018), encouraging student-led discussions or prompts (Becker, 1999; Del Nero, 2017; Larson, 2009) and offering varied options for response (Chandler, 1999; Del Nero, 2017). Student-centeredness was received positively by the students as the students reported that it made them feel more relevant (Del Nero, 2020, p. 192) and it was in contrast to more traditional, teacher-directed methods (Del Nero, 2017). Further, Raines et al. (2007) found that students demonstrated a clear preference for instructional methods permitting personal interpretations and aesthetic engagement. Furthermore, those studies implementing collaborative processes (e.g. Lee 2024a) and digital storytelling (Kesler et al., 2016) indicated that alongside deep engagement they fostered interpretation and sophisticated analytical skills through transmediation.

Reader response pedagogy appeared to have positive effects on students' overall reading and learning as there were results which indicated increased motivation, enthusiasm, personal investment, active participation in discussions and in activities, as well as sustained focus, which occasionally extending even beyond the instruction (Del Nero, 2020). According to Scherer (2022) student-centered, creative and visual responses engaged also weaker readers as the visual responses valued and elicited unique funds of knowledge from outside of school. Other positive outcomes reported were enhanced personal and literary understanding (e.g., Cox & Many, 1992; Many, 1991, 1992; Pilonieta & Hancock, 2012), interpreting symbolic and thematic messages (Pantaleo, 2012), analysis of visual storytelling techniques (Pantaleo, 2013, 2014), appreciation of authorial craft and design choices (Pantaleo, 2013, 2017), and engagement in higher-order thinking about the text (Pantaleo, 2012, 2013, 2014). A study by Many et al. (1996) also indicated for longer lasting benefits as the aesthetic stance was evident in written responses immediately after discussion, but also two weeks later. Relatedly, Many and Wiseman (1992) found that teaching approach influenced positively to the content of the responses: students in traditional literary-analysis group focused more on identifying literary elements, whereas in a literary-experience group centered on personal connections and aesthetic engagement.

5.3.2 The social and cultural dimensions

The analyses of the data revealed an emphasis on the social nature of reading and meaning-making through collaborative discussions and shared activities. The evidence for this social dimension largely stems from analyses of discussion transcripts revealing patterns of interaction, co-construction of meaning, and perspective sharing (e.g., Broughton, 2002; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Villaume & Hopkins, 1995). More recent research applies transactional theory to explore nuanced issues

of student identity, social justice, and specific learner populations. Studies have examined how dialogic transactions can support identity construction for marginalized students (Fecho & Amatucci, 2008), how aesthetic response can be used to challenge established gender roles (Hayik, 2022), and how wordless picture books can validate the translanguaging practices of emergent bilinguals (Lee, 2024b).

In a study by Villaume and Hopkins (1995), they showed the importance of transactions not only between reader and text but also among readers, illustrating how students navigated text, experiences, scenarios, and related texts and socially constructed their understanding of the text. It seemed that adding a social dimension to reading and related activities can lead to revised understanding (Eeds & Wells, 1989), increased classroom rapport (Del Nero, 2017), and a stronger sense of community (Larson, 2009). In studies by Lee and Wells (1989) and Flint (2010) student-centered literature discussions helped students to clarify their evocations and examine their personal interpretations (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Flint, 2010). Larson's (2009) study also indicated that there might be benefits in shifting the social element to online environments as it might enhance the opportunities for participation in a more equitable manner.

The positive benefits of the social dimension are not taken for granted. For example, in several studies the increase in empathy and cultural understanding required careful facilitation (Altieri, 1995; Broughton, 2002; Del Nero, 2018; Dressel, 2005; Pilonieta & Hancock, 2012; Schieble, 2010; Wissman, 2018) and carefully selected texts. Texts and their effect to aesthetic engagement was pondered in several studies, and it seemed that carefully selected texts with diverse characters can foster empathy, consideration of different perspectives, and challenging of preconceived notions (Broughton, 2002; Del Nero, 2018; Wissman, 2018). Hayik (2022) further demonstrated how engagement with a text that challenged gender roles empowered marginalized students and led to genuine, long-term shifts in perspective. Further, Lee (2024b) found that interactive shared reading of a wordless picture book created a translanguaging space.

The analyses of perceived benefits showed that reader response pedagogy might be relevant for cultural and linguistically diverse settings. Evidence supporting this potential were implemented in a data which included student self-reports of changed perspectives (Broughton, 2002) and analyses showing correlations between aesthetic response and cultural understanding within the context of the study (Dressel, 2005). In a study by Dressel (2005), she showed how using multicultural literature might reveal and enhance students' empathy of characters from non-dominant groups and support them in recognizing the uniqueness of cultural worldviews (Dressel, 2005). Despite of these promising results, Dressel (2005) also found that aesthetic engagement and empathy towards diversity do not automatically increase real-world sensitivity without pedagogical guidance. Additionally, Schieble (2010) further cautioned that poorly framed aesthetic prompts can reinforce othering.

Finally, reader-response approaches seemed contribute to overall identity development and self-awareness (Broughton, 2002; Charlton et al., 2014; Del Nero, 2017; Fecho & Amatucci, 2008; Hayik, 2022). Personal engagement with texts prompted reflection on identity, values, and worldviews. For example, Charlton et al. (2014) found that reading My Place led students to explore their place-related identities, while Del Nero (2017) described students realizing the importance of authenticity after engaging with Gothic literature and even noted: "These students assert how witnessing and engaging with peers on their aesthetic transactions with Gothic texts helps them see one another's more authentic selves" (p. 557). Furthermore, Broughton (2002) observed that using culturally relevant texts within this approach deepens sixth-grade girls' subjectivities. Fecho and Amatucci (2008) examined how dialogical classroom transactions enhance a student's self-perception as a reader, writer, and gay teenager.

6. DISCUSSION

This review investigated over three decades of research (1989-2024) on the applications of Louise Rosenblatt's transactional reader-response theory. The aim was to investigate what kind of pedagogical practices and texts have been implemented while striving for aesthetic engagement, and what kind of benefits are achieved through these practices and texts in the light of aesthetic engagement. In general, it can be said that the studies included in this review were in line with Rosenblatt's theory (1938/1995) and her pedagogical guidelines in terms of pedagogical practices, texts, and the benefits achieved. On the other hand, the study showed how flexibly Rosenblatt's theory can be applied to the changing needs of students and how empirical studies making use of the theory also showed that Rosenblatt's theory encourages pedagogical choices that deviate from the traditional texts and practices.

The results of the study show that literature discussions, free and creative writing, multimodal engagement, and teacher read-aloud were the key pedagogical practices in applying Rosenblatt's theory and that all these pedagogical practices aimed to enhance the reader's active role and personal engagement. In addition, several studies implemented more than one pedagogical practice. For example, the literature discussions were often complemented and strengthened by practices that allowed individual responses to narrative fiction and translated the aesthetic engagement into a tangible form. These individual—often creative writing—responses gave students possibilities to share their "lived-through experiences" socially in a student-led small-group discussion. The significance of this variation between individual responses and social sharing was evident in the perceived benefits of Rosenblatt's theory, as the benefits concentrated specifically on enhanced personal engagement and being socially active. In more recent studies of the applications of Rosenblatt's theory, reading materials were accompanied with digital applications such as digital storytelling and online platforms, which also

seemed to motivate and engage the students. Furthermore, this shows a concrete evidence of how Rosenblatt's theory can be adapted to the needs and interests of today's students.

Alongside the pedagogical practices, the results highlight the importance of text choices while implementing Rosenblatt's theory as several text types were recognized and many of the text types were not traditional verbal texts. It seemed that especially the more current studies chose more multimodal options – like wordless picture books and comic books – as reading materials. These multimodal reading materials were chosen to broaden and deepen students' interpretative abilities and to reach increasingly diverse readers. For example, Lee (2024a, b) found that wordless picture books with relevant themes create "translanguaging spaces" for bilingual students allowing them to take advantage of their full linguistic repertoire. Alongside the multimodality genres appealing to out-of-school interests —such as horror and humor—were chosen to enhance the aesthetic engagement. Furthermore, it seemed that the pedagogy based on Rosenblatt's theory was considered appropriate for challenging and complex topics like cultural and sexual diversity as well as to fostering empathy for marginalized characters.

One of the main results of this study was the integration of diverse modalities in pedagogical practices and text choices while striving for aesthetic engagement. This integration of visual arts, digital composition, digital storytelling, graphic narratives and creative visual methods to reading instruction seemed to empower students to express their interpretations, enrich their engagement and validate their cultural knowledge to reading. Further, the use of these modalities seemed to strengthen the personal connections between students and texts. In the pedagogical studies, students linked the narrative elements of fiction to their lives, leading to more meaningful engagement. This finding—that students link fiction to their lives leading to aesthetic engagement—challenges the findings by Soter et al. (2010) who state that students' aesthetic, personal and emotional responses frequently lack the crucial element of reflecting on the text's role in shaping that response.

The review identified two principal trends that emerged in the perceived benefits of adopting a Rosenblatt's reader-response theory: an emphasis on personal engagement and an attention to the social and cultural dimensions of reading. From another perspective, these benefits can also be grouped by their primary impact. The first category includes outcomes directly related to literature education and literacy, such as fostering a deeper personal understanding of literary texts. The second category comprises benefits for students' holistic personal growth, which includes cultivating empathy and cultural understanding and contributing to the development of identity and self-awareness. This later finding is in line with empirical research that investigates how transformative reading deepens readers' perceptions of themselves and others (Fialho, 2019).

Reading instruction, which follow Rosenblatt's approach, empower students by validating personal interpretations and by positioning them as active agents in the meaning-making process. While the potential for fostering empathy and cultural

understanding through engagement with diverse texts is significant, findings underscore the need for intentional instruction to guide perspective-taking and the role of collaboration between students. Ultimately, it seems that these factors—connecting personally, engaging deeply, interpreting actively, collaborating socially, and empathizing across differences—contribute to students' self-awareness and identity construction. The findings suggest that the perceived benefits of the reader-response approach are not attributable solely to pedagogical practices but emerge from a synergy between the pedagogy employed and the texts selected. Text choice often functions as the catalyst for aesthetic engagement; for example, selecting culturally relevant texts provides the foundation for cultivating empathy and can spark personal connections around themes of normalcy and fear. The studies show that without intentional facilitation, the benefits of a text can be lost or even subverted and pedagogical guidance might be required to move students from mere aesthetic involvement to genuine cultural understanding.

The heavy focus on younger readers in the corpus aligns with the historical influence of the student-oriented paradigm at these educational stages, as outlined in the theoretical framework. We argue that this preference reflects the aims of the primary school curriculum, where fostering a personal relationship with reading often precedes the later emphasis on critical and analytical reading skills prevalent in secondary education. This connection helps explain the empirical focus documented in the included studies.

When comparing the results of the review with other current studies on reading engagement and instruction, it is safe to say that Rosenblatt's theory might offer a useful tool for leading more inclusive and meaningful reading pedagogy. For example, Schoonover (2020), Cuero et al. (2008), Jewitt (2008), and Serafini (2012) collectively show that multimodal and aesthetic representations—ranging from visual art and design to expanded literacy models—can deepen students' comprehension by connecting classroom learning to personal experience and creative engagement. Further, there are several prior studies (Gourvennec & Sønneland, 2023; Murphy et al., 2009; Schrijvers et al., 2019; Soter et al., 2008) on student-led literature discussions and expressive approaches to reading and they all emphasize the role of literature discussions as spaces for negotiating meaning, sharing personal connections, and encountering diverse viewpoints and thereby directly fostering the social construction of understanding.

The results of this review offer tangible implications of Rosenblatt´s theory for contemporary education, particularly against the backdrop of declining reading habits and increasing digitization that were outlined in the introduction. The review's findings showed a change in the application of Rosenblatt's theory as there was a shift to use of multimodal materials and technologically integrated practices. This review demonstrates that while the core principles of transactional theory remain constant, its application has adapted to incorporate new technologies and a more critical, sociocultural perspective on reading. The consistent findings regarding enhanced personal and literary understanding, student-centeredness, and the social

nature of reading further underscore the approach's potential to develop well-rounded, critically engaged readers while also creating a space for critical dialogue on social justice. This review suggests that Rosenblatt's transactional theory is not a relic of a print-based era but a vital and adaptable framework for the multi-modality landscape, offering a promising approach for contemporary literacy education.

6.1 Limitations

While this review offers a comprehensive synthesis, several limitations must be acknowledged as they shape the scope and interpretation of the findings. The search for the data was implemented with English search terms. This may have affected the composition of the research data, and the data may not provide a complete picture of all the geographical or linguistic dimensions of the applications of Rosenblatt's theory. Another limitation is the methodological heterogeneity of the included studies. This heterogeneity limits the direct comparability of results and the generalizability of any single conclusion. Specifically, the evidence base for the perceived benefits of the reader-response approach (Section 5.3) is predominantly drawn from qualitative studies (n=31, 79.5%), with a high proportion of these being case studies, and research characterized by generally small sample sizes. Consequently, the positive effects described are heavily reliant on student-reported experiences, researcher observations, and localized descriptive data, rather than robust, large-scale efficacy testing. This methodological landscape means the review can make descriptive, but not causal, claims about the benefits of the pedagogy, which is an important consideration for interpreting the results. Further, focusing separately on individual pedagogical practices, text types, and perceived benefits of the implementation of Rosenblatt's theory does not provide a comprehensive picture of the significance of individual studies or the connections between the areas examined. However, in the results section a careful effort has made to refer to and present the source articles related to each notion and providing the information also in the tables.

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