- **How are different readings produced using specific reading practices within a reader-centred approach?**
- **What does it mean to read *with* and *across* the text?**

5 Theoretical Perspectives

Beach (1993) identified five theoretical perspectives it is possible to take within a reader-centred approach. These perspectives include a range of 'experiences' that help readers to make sense of the text.

The 5 perspectives are:
- Knowledge of text conventions (textual theories)
- Modes of experience (experiential theories)
- Psychological perspective (psychological theories)
- Social context (social theories)
- Cultural identities (cultural theories)

Beach's Five Perspectives
- Represent different angles or lenses that highlight particular aspects of the reader/writer/text/context transaction (Beach, 1993, p. 8);
- Are interrelated and work together in the meaning making process through a focus on readers' textual knowledge and experience embedded within larger social and cultural contexts;
- Envelop the reading stages and process strategies outlined in Thomson's (1978) model.

Knowledge of text conventions (textual theories)

A reader pursues a personal response though the knowledge they have accumulated about how texts work--not just through a focus on the words on the page--asking, for example:

Has my experience of reading other similar texts helped me to predict an ending? (see stage 1 of Thomson's model);

How has my knowledge of symbols, images and narrative structure helped me to understand the novel (see stages 1 & 4 of Thomson's model)?;

Who is the implied author of this text, i.e., who is the persona/s writing this text? (see stage 5 of Thomson's model);

Who are the implied (or ideal) readers for the text?

How does that implied author connect with the implied reader/s? (see stage 6 of Thomson's model);

Has the use of particular points of view encouraged me to take up some characters' perspectives more than others?;

Have I read the text intertextually? That is, what other texts, of any genre, helped to produce meaning?;

Has my knowledge of different literary strategies helped me to keep reading?

[Link all stages of Thomson's (1978) model to the five perspectives]

How does a textual perspective work in practice?

Apply questions above to a range of different texts e.g., The use of the first person in *Looking for Alibrandi* encourages some alignment (identification and empathy) with the implied author, narrator, protagonist, Josie.

The textual perspective works together with the experiential perspective in this example.

Modes of personal experience (experiential theories) intrinsic factors

The experiential perspective is perhaps the most common lens through which we produce reader-centred readings.

Experiential theorists focus on the nature of readers' personal engagement or experiences with texts—the ways in which, for example, readers identify with characters, visualize images, relate personal experiences to the text, or construct the world of the text, (Beach, p. 8) asking questions for example:

How do you engage with the experiences and world of the text?;

Do you identify, at least at times, with the characters?;

Can you visualise images and symbols in the novel?;

Are you the implied reader for this novel? Why do you become (or not) the implied reader; why do you agree/disagree with the invited reading?;

How do you as a reader fill the gaps left in the text (through your life experiences, cultural assumptions, and knowledge of genres and textual features)?;

Can you relate personal or vicarious experiences to the novel? Do you know similar people? Have you experienced similar events?

[see especially stages 2-4 of Thomson's model]

How does the experiential perspective work in practice?

Implied reader 1 (the single working mother from a country outside Australia -- with child's interest at heart) produces invited reading 1 of *Mum goes to work* (Gleeson, 1992) e.g.,

As a single working mother from another country I can easily identify with the mother's experience of leaving their children at a child-care centre. I found the written and the visual text collaborated to reassure me that the children were all very happily engaging in educational play while their mothers worked at jobs away from them.

Modes of psychological experience (i.e., including psychological and psychoanalytical theories)

Psychological and psychological theorists focus on readers' cognitive or subconscious processes respectively and how those processes vary according to both unique individual personality and developmental level. Readers reading from a *psychological perspective* could ask:

2

How do you relate to the text in terms of cognitive development and personality?

Is your reading similar to or different from other readers'?

Would you enjoy reading this novel in ten years time? Why/why not?

Do the characters' personalities relate to yours, for example your search for and sense of identity?

How does your present mood impact on your reading of the novel?

How does your knowledge of people and events help you to predict outcomes of events and the way the text will end?

Readers reading from a *psychoanalytical perspective* could consider:

- applying their own unique personality or identity style to the characters and events in the text i.e., analogising. Readers can also use analogy in the reverse in so far as they build new identities through their interactions with texts.

- acknowledging that one criticism of the psychoanalytic reader-identity theory is that it assumes a unified individual – a modernist concept of the self (i.e. readers who have a single identity). Cultural/world context theories of sociology and reading disagree and propose instead that readers might have multiple identities (a post-modernist concept of subjectivities) that they bring to their reading of a text (Beach, 1993, p.96). The case for readers bringing multiple identities to bear on the text is taken up by the cultural perspective.

How does the psychological perspective work in practice?

Note a section of the *reading* from a psychological perspective in Beach, (1993, p.13).

... As I envision them [the mushrooms] taking over the world I grow increasingly more apprehensive and fascinated by their very audacity"

How does the psychoanalytical perspective work in practice?

Note a section of the *reading* from a psychoanalytic in Beach, (1993, p.13).

... I am intrigued by these competing feelings of feeling powerless (We are selves, we are Tables) something I experience often in my own life....

Note the *reflection/defense* of psychoanalytic reading practices in the last paragraph in Beach, (1993, p.95).

In responding to "Mushrooms" I am playing out a tension inherent in my own identity style, a tension between assertion of power – both political and sexual, as reflected in the metaphor of the physical upheaval of the mushrooms – and an awareness of the dangers inherent in the assertion of power. I trace this tension to a recollection of my own socialisation as a male child.... I am aware of the need to distance myself from coping with this tension...."

Social context (social theories) extrinsic factors

Social theorists focus on the influence of the social context on the reader/text transaction. The context in which you read a text produces a different response, e.g., whether you are you reading for pleasure/ to escape; to demonstrate your knowledge at a seminar or in an assignment (see Beach, 1993, pp. 8-9).

Readers using the social perspective could ask:

How did you react to reading the novel for a university course rather than for pleasure?

How would you respond if you were reading this text as a teacher?

Do you see this as a novel that you would enjoy reading outside this course?

How does the social perspective work in practice?
Think about how reading books on the reading list in preparation for an assessment task, is different from how you could be reading them over the Christmas holidays.

Cultural identities (towards world context theories)
Finally, cultural theorists focus on how readers' cultural roles, attitudes, and values, as well as the larger cultural, historical context, shape responses. For example, members of a religious sect are socialized to respond to sacred texts according to the cultural values of that sect (Beach, 1993, p. 9).
Reading from a cultural perspective readers could ask:
> Do you connect with the views, values and ideologies expressed in the text?
> How do the ideologies you are invited to accept in the text match or mismatch with your own? Why is this so?
> [See stage 6 of Thomson's model]

How does the cultural identities perspectives work in practice?
Why might some 21st century readers of the novels by Enid Blyton produce different readings from the readings produced by those who read the novels in the 1950s, when they were first published?
How does the overlapping of the five perspectives work in practice to produce invited and alternative readings of texts?

Constructing alternative readings – reading *across* the text
An alternative reading is a reading that disagrees slightly with the invited reading, but the disagreement still agrees with the central ideological sway of the text. These are readings that only slightly challenge prevailing views by *beginning* to look at the SILENCES in the text. *Silences* result from the fact that textual gaps enable readers to avoid questioning certain cultural values (Moon, 2001, p. 129). This form of a reader-centred reading aligns with stage 6 of Thomson's model.
Before we can read across the text we must read with it: e.g., the invited reading of *Mum Goes to Work* (Gleeson 1992). She portrays a 90s Mum who is 'liberated' yet still the prime caregiver for children. She loves and cares for her children, the traditional role for mothers (see illustrations). Part of that caring role is finding appropriate child-care arrangements. Mum is shown to exercise her choice (and needs) to work inside or outside the home.

An alternative reading:
I enjoyed seeing that these Mums were out and about doing a variety of jobs. However, I could not identify even vicariously with the contented Mums in the stories. Rather, I read this text against an article which appeared in the *Courier Mail* (14/11/98) titled The universal mother: mothers are all things to all people. Alongside the two 'literary' texts I compared my own 'lived text' as a working mother.

A defense of the alternative reading:
Reading the three texts together (intertextuality) enabled me to make an *alternative reading* which centred around the guilt and sheer exhaustion which often engulfs the

working Mum *(experiential & cultural reading)*. I recognised that although I agreed to a point with the invited reading (Mums have the right and need to work outside the home) I was not fulfilling the role *of the implied reader* because I could not accept this as a complete happy families story (see also Johnson, 1999, 2002).

Concluding Comments

Beach (1993) has identified five theoretical perspectives from which to take within a reader-centred approach.

The 5 perspectives are:
- Knowledge of text conventions (textual theories)
- Modes of experience (experiential theories)
- Psychological perspective (psychological theories)
- Social context (social theories)
- Cultural identities (cultural theories)

These 5 theoretical perspectives represent what it is that the reader brings to his/her transaction with the text in order to produce a reader-centred or "personal" reading. When reading a text you will most likely use MORE THAN ONE of Beach's (1993) perspectives at any particular point of your response.

The stages and process strategies in Thomson's (1978) model incorporate all of Beach's (1993) perspectives but present them (in a zig-zag manner) as more accessible reading practices.

The points under each of the 5 perspectives highlight the specific reading practices that can be used within each of the 5 theoretical perspectives.

You should now be able to identify **how** you are producing a reader centred reading of a text, i.e., defend you reading practices i.e., write a defense of those reading practices that you have used to produce a reader-centred reading.