

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Methodology.**

The study for this paper is an 'action-research' with myself as the researcher. I have ten years teaching experience. I chose to look at my own teaching of writing as I felt that I needed to see whether my teaching methods could help my students improve their writing skills and at the same time to do a self-evaluation on the teaching method I adopted. I also needed to know why many of the students were not very enthusiastic about writing essays in class especially 'free-essay'. According to Dr.Fatimah Hashim, in a graduate seminar on "Action Research: Dispelling Myths", (6<sup>th</sup> Dec, 1997), 'even though action research may not be taken seriously by 'serious' researchers, it shows valid area of study especially in improving one own's teaching'.

### **Sample.**

For the purpose of this study, the sample used was a group of students from a Form Four Science class in a school in Petaling Jaya. The total number of students in the class was 42, of which 24 were boys and 18 girls. From these 42 students, 9 were Malays (5 boys, 4 girls), 24 Chinese (12 boys, 12 girls), 8 Indians (7 boys, 1 girl) and 1 from Sabah, a Sino-Kadazan girl. In addition, 15 of the students were from a Chinese school (remove classes) background with quite low proficiency in English Language. They were also from the lower middle income families such as having fathers working

as hawkers, carpenters, mechanics and wiremen as compared to others in the class whose fathers were white collar workers. The group of students was also a mixed ability group – ranging from excellent to very weak in English. Some of the students scored A in their PMR examination while some even scored D in the same examination.

The lessons were conducted for several weeks (10 lessons of 35 minutes each = 350 minutes, over a period of 5 weeks). The students were told that they would be writing a kind of composition called “free/continuous essay using several steps that would be explained to them. The first lesson was on an ‘argumentative essay’ topic. During the two periods of English lesson (70 minutes), the students were given the topic – “ A lot of our life is spent doing useless things. Is this true?” First of all, the teacher explained what was meant by the topic. The students also discussed the topic given among themselves. They were also given some examples of what was meant by ‘useless things and these examples were written on the board. After that, the teacher explained about the various steps involved in writing an essay, from the planning stage to the final draft. They were told that various steps were involved. They must start their work by writing down all their ideas on papers first. They could discuss these ideas/points with their friends. Then, they should arrange these points and write their rough copy on a piece of paper first before copying it in the exercise book. They were also told that they could show their rough copy to the teacher first before writing it in their book. All these were done orally in class during the first 30 minutes of the lesson. Then, the students were told to start their work in class and to follow the steps explained to them earlier. For the

next 30 minutes, the students were left on their own to work while the teacher went around the class to see them doing the work and to give whatever help necessary.

At the end of the lesson, since the students did not manage to finish their work in class, they were told to take the work home as homework and to hand in the work two days later in their next English class. In the next English class, the teacher collected the homework but not many students did the work. Only half of the class handed the work. However, in the next few lessons, the work was not mentioned anymore. The work was marked, graded and returned by the teacher the following week. Only three periods were spent on this topic.

The next lesson on the 'free essay' was only given about two weeks later. Several periods were spent on this topic alone. However, this time, the teacher did not give the topic first to the students. The lesson started with the teacher explaining to the class about the various steps involved in writing an essay i.e. from brainstorming of ideas, writing an outline, writing several drafts and finally writing the final product. They were also told the reasons why they should do these steps. After that only the teacher told the class the topic of the essay, which was another argumentative essay, "Uniforms are not necessary". Then they were told that the whole class would be doing each of these steps together in class to ensure that they understand what was involved in each step and how to do it. The rationale given to them was that, even if they do not have the time in the exam to follow these steps, at least the exercise would help train them to write better and think systematically before writing. The next half an hour was spent on the first step, brainstorming of ideas. The whole class contributed ideas on both sides of the topic (agree and disagree). All the points were written on the board under two

different headings. At times, the students were asked to explain their points by giving examples. After that, the teacher explained to them how to use these points to write an outline or skeleton of the essay. One sample was done on the board for them to see. The lesson ended with the students being told to do an outline as homework and to hand in the work on the next day.

The next lesson started with the teacher returning the students' work (outline). The teacher then told the students that they could start planning their essay based on the outline they did – i.e. decide on the number of paragraphs and arrange the points. They were told to start writing their first draft. They could do it on a piece of paper or in their exercise book. Two periods (70 minutes) were used for the students to write the first drafts. By the end of the second period, everyone had to hand in the work even though it was incomplete. All the work was collected and the teacher looked through them and corrected the work done so far.

In the next English class, the first drafts were returned. Those who did not finish the work were told to continue the work while the others who had finished could start on the second draft.

Due to time constrain, some of the students only managed to do two drafts while others only did one draft. All in all, about seven periods were used for this one particular topic which was stretched over a period of three weeks.

Overall, three periods were used for the first essay topic whereas seven periods for the second topic. However, all these ten periods of lesson ( $10 \times 35 = 350$  minutes) were

not conducted continuously. They were other lessons (English) on other units (i.e. grammar, comprehension) conducted in between these 10 periods.