

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

#### Introduction

*A learner-centered approach to teaching recognises the fact that each student is a unique individual. As such, the students' responses to literary texts should be cultivated and developed in order to ensure that he or she will have a meaningful experience with the text.*

The objective of this study is to examine how students' responses towards literary texts can be developed using journal writing as a technique. This chapter will present a comprehensive review on the relevant literature to provide a context for this study. Firstly, I will discuss the various forms of literary texts i.e. genre and how these literary texts are a wealth of resources in the ESL classroom. Next, to develop a theoretical framework, the aesthetic stance in reading and Rosenblatt's (1978) reader-response theory will be examined. Finally, the role of journal writing in literature learning and teaching will be presented and some research studies that have employed journal writing as a tool in developing students' responses towards literary texts will be reviewed.

#### Literary Texts and Genres

According to Sithamparam (1996), when a writer uses words to imaginatively record, explain, explore and shape his experiences and feelings, he creates literature. This piece of literary writing is referred to as a literary text. These texts are presented in a specific structure or form which is referred to as "genre".

Literary texts comprise of the following genre: prose, poetry and drama. As each genre has distinctly different features, it is important that the teacher be familiar with the features of the text.

Poetry, perhaps the oldest form of literature, is language at its most concentrated form. It is a composition usually written in verse and is meant to be read/spoken, relying strongly on precise word choices, sounds, and imagery to create a mood in the reader's mind/ear. These compositions are vivid and written with an intensity of feelings and various poetic devices such as metaphors and personifications are used to heighten and highlight the message that is being conveyed.

Prose refers to continuous pieces of writing and is generally reserved for the writing of fiction: novels, novellas and short stories. Prose writers creatively use language to create a mixture of characters, places and events that construct an entire world on page and in the reader's mind. Here, the writer explores and highlights issues and concerns of human interests and needs which readers may reflect upon, draw valuable lessons from and more importantly, relate to their own lives.

Finally, drama refers to plays with stage directions. It comprises chiefly of dialogue between characters and is usually intended for dramatic or theatrical performance rather than reading.

Hornsby and Wing Jan in Evans, J. (2001) believe that teaching using literary texts can evoke emotions. They recommend that a language classroom make use of quality literary texts as a resource as it can help learners to develop their responses. As such, it would be beneficial if our students are exposed to literary texts as it would aid their language development and increase their cultural awareness and encourage their personal growth.

## Reasons For Using Literary Texts In The ESL Classroom

As literary texts could help in the growth and development of an individual and in language learning, it is important that our students be exposed to literary texts. *As such these texts ought to be included in the ESL classroom. The reasons for using* literary texts in the ESL classroom can be divided into three main categories; to aid language development, to promote cultural appreciation and awareness and to encourage the personal growth and development of the reader.

### *Language Development*

Literary texts can help students master the vocabulary and grammar of the language as well as the four main language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. According to Povey (1981), literary texts introduce students to extensive and subtle vocabulary usage and accurate syntax while serving as a model of *language use. These texts can help students to internalise the grammar of a second* language. In order for this to occur, students need to be exposed to a variety of texts by which they can deduce the meanings of words through contextual clues.

Krashen's (1985) comprehensible input,  $i+1$ , states that the more exposure to comprehensible input, the greater the acquisition. Based on this acquisition theory, it *can be theorised* that students would be able to improve their language by reading more literary texts as they are good input for second language learners.

Listening and speaking skills can be developed through the use of poetry. Hall (1989, p. 7) states that poetry "will encourage students to read aloud with clarity and to talk with confidence, while it will also promote the ability to listen with attention". As such, poems provide wonderful and exciting opportunities to practise speech-related elements such as pronunciation, articulation, intonation and stress.

Literary texts also expose students to different writing styles, which will unconsciously help them develop their own writing skills. Chin (1989) and Gwin (1990) state that as literary texts expose students to coherent and expert writing, it can encourage them to write well. This is especially so in creative writing. For example, short stories and novels provide excellent examples of descriptive and narrative writing. Even poems can be used as models to lead students into poetry writing. (Tibbetts, 1998).

Literature also fosters an overall increase in reading proficiency (McRae, 1982). Practice in reading promotes understanding and enjoyment and increases the learner's reading rate. Literary texts, which are rich in multiple levels of meanings, offer opportunities for our students to develop their abilities to make inferences and interpretations while reading, and so improve their reading skills. Thus, it is clearly evident that literary texts can be used in the ESL classroom as a device to increase language development.

### Cultural Awareness And Appreciation

Literary texts are a window to cultures of the world as it allows the reader to immerse into the world that is depicted. According to Carter and Long (1991), literature provides humanistic values as they enable the students to "understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own time and space". These literary texts reflect the rich and fascinating diversity of our world, and by exposing our students to multicultural literary texts, we are allowing them to cross cultural borders and understand and appreciate the different cultures around the world.

Students would be able to understand that human issues, concerns and emotions are universal regardless of time, belief, ideology and culture. According to Byram and Morgan (1994), discovering similarities and differences in other cultures *not only heightens the students' awareness of other cultures but also stimulates their interest and curiosity about other people*. Thus, by reading literary texts students will understand and be sensitive to the cultures of the world.

#### Personal Growth And Development

*Literary texts are about real people who live in a real world, and their experiences are real life experiences to which the reader can relate*. Carter and Long (1991) view literary texts as a special resource for personal development and growth as it encourages "greater sensitivity and self-awareness and greater understanding of the world around us". They are extremely powerful as they are able to immerse *students' into the world they portray by involving them with the characters, plots and themes; they transport them into a whole new setting and bring them into contact with different cultures and situations*. As such, these texts will help students' grow as individuals as well as in their relationship with the people and institutions around them.

*Literary texts have the ability to engage the reader as it encourages them to explore their emotional and intellectual responses to the texts*. Students not only relate to the texts but also evaluate what they read by identifying similarities, distinguishing differences, and making predictions and conclusions. This helps in developing their creative, critical and analytical thinking skills especially when they are asked to respond personally to the texts using their own experiences in life.

All these clearly indicate that literary texts are able to help students develop their affective, cognitive and metacognitive skills. However, although literary texts have great potential in the ESL classrooms, much depends on how the teacher exploits these resources. *In the following section I will explain the different stances in reading literary texts.*

### The Reading Of Literary Texts

According to Rosenblatt (1978) there are two stances in the reading of literary texts: the *efferent* and the *aesthetic*. The *efferent* stance focuses on the information the reader is expected to take away and use during or after reading. Traditional approaches to literature instruction favour an *efferent* stance to literature. When students read literature *efferently*, they are reading to study it and not to experience it.

Reading with an *experiential* focus and not an *information-extracting* focus produces what Rosenblatt (1978) calls an *aesthetic* experience for the reader. Corcoran (1987) describes *aesthetic* reading as one that involves "those aspects of remembrance, speculation, and association, which are evoked in the process of creating a story or poem". The *aesthetic* reader focuses on what happens during the *reading event*.

Rosenblatt (1978) explains that *aesthetic* response puts the reader in the text world making reading a "lived-through experience". Here, students are encouraged to experience the literary text by immersing themselves in its story world and by bringing to it their prior experiences, attitudes and values. Most readings often occur along a continuum of *aesthetic* and *efferent* responses.

However, in the Malaysian classrooms, due to the examination-oriented environment and lack of time, teachers emphasize more on text-driven comprehension in reading. In this situation, a teacher-centered approach is adopted where the students are merely listeners and the teacher imparts knowledge about the text. As such, even high-English-proficiency students are denied the opportunity of engaging aesthetically with the literary texts.

There is a great need to encourage our students to engage with the literary texts aesthetically. This will give them the opportunity to experience the texts and make connections with their own lives and thus develop their responses. In order to do so, a student-centered approach to teaching literary texts should be used. The reader-response approach is one which is student-centered, and allows our students to bring in their personal experiences while experiencing the literary texts aesthetically.

### Reader-Response Approach To Literary Texts

Selden (1989, p. 132) observes that we can no longer talk about the meaning of a text without considering the reader's contribution to it. The reader-response theory places importance on the role of the reader as an active participant in meaning-making while reading a text.

This theory's origin is in the field of literary criticism. It challenges traditional assumptions that when one is making interpretations of texts, one should only take into consideration the author's intention in a text, and on the text itself. Instead, this theory asserts that the reader plays at least an equal role in the interpretative process. Hence, the reader has replaced the text as the most central element in reading.

Theories of reader-response explain how readers create meaning. There are three aspects that have to be taken into consideration: the reader, the text and the context. Based on these three aspects, scholars and researchers have agreed on the following assumptions on the reader response theory :

- (i) Meaning is not "contained" in a text, but is derived from an interaction between the content and structure of the author's message and the experience and prior knowledge of the reader.
- (ii) Readers comprehend differently because every reader is culturally and *individually unique*.
- (iii) Examining readers' responses to texts is more valid than establishing one "correct" interpretation of text meaning.

*(Chase & Hynd, 1987)*

Thus, meaning is made by the reader, not found (Probst, 1981). The reader-response approach is a clear reminder to the teacher that each student has great potential in the meaning-making process and they should be encouraged to articulate and develop their unique responses.

In short, the reader-response theory has brought about a significant impact on the teaching of literature as it places emphasis on aesthetic responses which encourage the reader "to live through reading," evoking "what the words [are] stirring up - associations, ideas, attitudes, sensations, or feelings" (Rosenblatt, 1991).

#### Reader's Aesthetic Response To Literary Texts

The ultimate aim in a reader-response approach is to achieve a matured response from the reader. Response is the product of the interaction between the reader and the text. Rosenblatt (1978) describes response to literature not as answering a series



of questions or attending to a collection of details but as a transaction between the reader and the text. As such, responding to literary texts should go beyond retelling the storyline and narrating the sequence of events.

*Response becomes aesthetic when the reader engages personally with the literary texts.* Adopting an aesthetic stance occurs when students live through the text or as Tolkien (1964) says, "enter a secondary world". By stepping into the text world, students are able to envision and interpret what is described, respond emotionally to the characters, rationalize and understand their actions and make *judgements whether to accept the issues and concerns discussed.* As such, Beach and Marshall (1991) suggest that students respond by engaging, describing, connecting, interpreting, explaining and judging. At a higher level of response, they make connections between the text and their experience with their knowledge of language, literary and social conventions to make meaning.

*According to the Thomson's (1987) Developmental Model (Appendix E) of a reader-response approach to teaching literature, in order to achieve an aesthetic response it is necessary for the reader to journey through certain levels.* Here, the reader begins at Level 1 where their efferent response shows superficial understanding of the text. In Level 2, the reader begins to show transaction with the text by producing affective responses, where the reader gets involved with the story by empathising with the characters and events. Level 3 requires the reader to connect literature to their own lives while at Level 4, the reader reflects on the significance of events and behaviour in the text. Finally, in Level 5, the reader begins to recognise the forms of narration and evaluates the text. The development in the students' response is evaluated based on their progress in these levels.

Thus, in order for readers to create genuine and aesthetic responses to literary texts and progress into higher levels of response, it is important that there is significant and meaningful engagement between the text and the reader, in which the reader will achieve satisfaction from her reading experience. Satisfaction here is defined as increased self-knowledge where the reader gains awareness of her involvement with the text.

Activities that encourage students to develop aesthetic responses, would enable these students to imaginatively place themselves in the role of the characters in the text so that they are able to feel and empathise. Hence, they are more sensitive to social issues and thus are able to develop deeper understandings and awareness of the social and cultural conditions around them and the issues and concerns these different personalities encounter. This allows the students to reflect and pass mature judgement as they are able to interact emotionally and intellectually with the text when they become more aware of the story's element.

The reader-response approach would also encourage these students to make personal connections between literature, their own lives and the world. Research has also shown that readers who participate in approaches that are response-based would be able to make connections between what they have read and the world around them, and this helps them make personal choices and understand their own world (Samway et al., 1991; Galda, 1992; Borders & Naylor, 1993).

Each individual who reads a text brings a wealth of emotions, experiences and knowledge to a reading that, in turn, provokes associations with the words, images and ideas in the text. As such he or she will definitely have some form of response. According to Bonnycastle (1991), this is the reason why the reader-response approach presumes that no two students will read a text and get the same meaning.

As meaning is constructed by unique individuals, multiple interpretations are to be expected and even celebrated. Many different interpretations of the same text are likely to, and indeed should, occur and can be accepted instead of just one correct interpretation. This is proven in the studies carried out by Chase and Hynd (1987) and Almasi (1995) where the responses show the readers' varying opinion. This clearly shows that making meaning is indeed dynamic, reflective and introspective.

As the reader-response approach places emphasis on the reader as an active and reflective maker of meaning, all activities should be learner-centered and creative enough to allow the students to explore the meaning of the text on their own. One way for teachers to promote an aesthetic experience with any piece of literary text is journal writing as it is a simple yet effective method in tapping individual responses from the students.

### *Developing Response Through Writing*

Writing is a critical ingredient in meaning making, enabling learners to articulate connections between new information and previous knowledge. Writing in response to literary texts can be a great way for students to organize their thoughts, explore what they think, express themselves and even generate ideas.

According to Atwell (1987), he "suspected that kids' written responses to books would go deeper than their talk; that writing would give them time to consider their thinking and that thought captured would spark new insights"( p. 165). Students would have to conceptualize and writing acts as a springboard for them to organize their readings into a response as it is a powerful tool that can be used to make sense of one's thoughts and to reflect on feelings.

Hornsby and Wing Jan (2001) believe a learner cannot develop in any other way better than when written response is encouraged as writing allows the writer to follow a line of thought more carefully. According to them, a written product is *achieved after lots of thinking, feeling and reflecting. This is because when a writer writes, he/she can scribble, delete, reorganise and so on before finally deciding on how the thoughts are going to be recorded.* Thus, writing allows for critical thinking.

This particular research study centers on how students' responses to literary texts are developed using journal writing. As the topic relates to the broader issue of the *role of writing in students' learning, studies that investigate this role have been included.*

Marshall's (1987) study demonstrates the positive effects of writing on students' literary understanding. This study is on the effects of different kinds of writing assignments on students' understanding of short stories and it shows that *different types of writing assignments affect students' literary learning in different ways.* For example, students who wrote using their prior knowledge or experiences and values to elaborate on their responses and feelings to the stories surpassed students in the restricted writing assignment which focussed more on information gathering. Finally, a study conducted by Tierney et al.(1989) shows that writing increases *students' critical thinking which would definitely help students give indepth responses.*

Based on the above discussion, it is felt that a writing activity such as journal writing would be an interesting activity to help develop students' responses to literary texts.

## Journal Writing

Flitterman-King (1988) refers to journals as a "source book, a repository for wandering and wonderings, speculations, questioning...a place to explore thoughts, discover reactions, *let the mind ramble-in effect, a place to make room for the unexpected*".

Journals are literary artifacts of the students as readers and writers and according to Sommer (1989), they are a safe place to practice writing daily without the restrictions of form, audience, and evaluation. Journal writing invariably strengthens *reading and writing skills. By putting thoughts on paper, students are forced to make sense of the text.* It requires the readers' sustained attention as they work to develop their own meanings.

Journal writing is the closest to natural speech, and writing can flow without self-consciousness or inhibition. It reveals thought processes and mental habits, it aids *memory, and it provides a context for healing and growth. This personal engagement adds a necessary affective element to the learning process.*

Encouraging students to habitually write in their journals will allow them to learn to clarify and refine their thoughts. Journals are a means of self-expression and is a text written in the student's authentic voice. Thus, journal writing enables the *students to have a voice in their work.* The words in literary texts are the voices of the writers. By responding to the texts through writing, students are bringing in their voice. As such, the entries in the journals will have the reader's distinctive voice.

Hancock (1992) and Tashlik (1987) pointed on the positive effects of journal writing on students' literature learning, in terms of better understanding and insights *about literary works.* Hancock's analysis of a sixth-grader's response to literary texts showed that through expressing her thoughts and feelings, the student moved beyond

mere comprehension to developing insights into the literary text that she had read. Tashlik, who carried out an interview in his study, found that his students believed that responding to literary texts using journal writing was more educational as it *enabled them to develop deeper comprehension, and involvement with the text.*

When writing their responses during and after an aesthetic transaction, students need to organize their thoughts and feelings about the text. This process would require them to be analytical, critical and reflective. Thus, their affective, cognitive and metacognitive skills will be applied.

*Ali (1994) conducted a study on the incorporation of the reader-response approach into the teaching of short stories to a group of 15 second-year-engineering students in the National University of Malaysia (UKM). The results clearly indicate that developing responses towards literary texts through journal writing does encourage creative and critical thinking to take place. This is due to the fact that the participants were encouraged to develop their responses in an atmosphere where there were neither threats nor compulsion to learn for the correct answer or to compete for the best interpretation.*

Both Fuhler (1994) and Berger (1996) found success in eliciting response from their learners through the use of journal writing. According to them, the use of *journals has taught them that "active readers are attentive readers, and attentive readers soon become engaged and willing readers".* Fuhler (1994) suggests that journals allow students to have a voice, and having a voice that is heard leads to the acceptance of responsibility. Research indicates that when students participate in response-based activities, they develop ownership to what they read and to their own responses. In short, a writing activity such as journal writing is an effective technique in encouraging students to develop their responses towards literary texts.

However, in the Malaysian literature classroom, students have not been encouraged to develop their personal responses towards literary texts. As such, even students with high English proficiency may be at a loss as to how they should *respond to literary texts*. Also, as *journal writing is a relatively new technique and unfamiliar to these students*, they would need some form of guidance so that their response would move beyond mere comprehension to deeper involvement and insights into the texts.

In such a situation, the teacher plays an important role in assisting and *guiding the students towards developing matured and in-depth responses*. Guided journal writing, where students are given questions to guide them in giving in-depth responses to literary texts, may be the answer.

#### Guided Journal Writing

According to Vygotsky, nurturing is essential to assist learners' in realising their potential. He views learning as a shared process, and so believes that children are capable of more competent performance when they have assistance from capable adults or peers. Each student would be able to exceed his/her zone of proximal development, which according to Vygotsky is the difference between the child's capacity to solve problems on his/her own and his/her capacity to solve them with assistance. Here, the teacher is the enabler who builds scaffolds to assist the students to reach the next level. This is especially essential in activities that are new and unfamiliar to the students.

As journal writing is a new activity to these students, they would need some form of guidance as they may not know how to write their responses. This was confirmed

by a study conducted by Fuhler (1994), where she realised that she had to teach her eighth-grade students how to respond well in their journals.

A study conducted by Berger (1996) confirmed the need for a capable teacher's guide. *This study clearly shows that adolescent readers need a guide when writing in their journals.* Her classroom experience indicated that students would not be able to make meaning if they did not know how. Thus, they were writing their responses without direction. In order to overcome this issue, Berger formulated four main questions that her students used as guide when writing in their journals. She found *that the journal guide resulted in her students becoming more aware as they read.* They began to have a deep involvement with the texts and this led to them understanding, responding and enjoying the literary texts. Thus, their written responses were more in-depth and the students themselves were more confident.

Another study was carried out by Wong et al. (2002) who studied the effects of *guided journal writing on students' story understanding.* This study used the question frame developed by Berger (1996) in order to elicit cognitive, metacognitive and affective reactions from the students. The students who wrote the journals felt that the act of writing made them think deeper about the texts, triggered more ideas, clarified their thinking, and helped them retain what they understood. In short, *writing drives their thinking.* Also, the question frames guided the students to think and feel deeply and comprehensively about the main characters, their relationships and the events that occur in the literary texts.

Thus, bearing in mind that the students involved in this study are new to the reader-response approach and journal writing, the guided journal writing technique *has been adopted in this study.* It is hoped that by providing guidance and direction



to the students, they would be able to give matured and in-depth responses towards literary texts.

As Clay (1991) says, " If a teacher works alongside a child, letting her do all that she can but supporting the activity when she reaches some limit by sharing the task, the teacher is more likely to uncover the cutting edges of the student's learning."

In this chapter, I have given a conceptual and theoretical framework for my study by explaining different genres of literary texts and reasons for using them in the ESL classroom. I have also elaborated on how the reader-response approach will help develop *aesthetic responses towards literary texts and how students' responses can be developed through a writing activity such as journal writing*. In the next chapter, I will discuss the procedures used for gathering and analyzing the data for this study.