

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

The main objective of this qualitative study is to examine the development of students' responses towards literary texts using journal-writing. In order to do so, data was obtained through the students' journal, teacher-researcher's journal and interviews. In this chapter, the findings will be discussed and analysed using the descriptive analysis.

This study was driven by three research questions which focused on the development of students' responses towards literary texts using journal-writing, the use of guided questions in helping students give in-depth responses and students' perception regarding the use of journal-writing. The discussions in this chapter will attempt to answer these research questions.

Firstly, the students' written responses to the literary texts will be described and analysed based on both its' physical attributes and the content matter. Also, the effect of the guided questions on their responses will be analysed and compared to the responses produced without guide. Finally, the perception of the students' towards the use of journal writing in developing their responses will be discussed.

Students' Response To Literary Texts

Both the reader and the text are vital in the process of literary reading as matured response to literary texts can only occur when the reader has a special interaction with the text. According to Rosenblatt's (1978) reader-response theory, aesthetic reading requires the reader to select ideas from the text and synthesize them

into a new experience. In this situation, the reader becomes a part of the text and, as Wilhelm (1997) illustrated, enters "the story world".

Thus, the reader interacts with the text as he/she shares and experiences the story together with the characters. Also, the text becomes a part of the reader as he is experiencing the events in the text. It is this bonding with the text that would bring about in-depth responses from the reader. In short, response emerges out of the reader's ability to experience and live the text.

What will be discussed here is the development of response of three high proficiency students and three low proficiency students towards literary texts using journal writing. In order to do so, their written responses to two literary texts will be examined and categorised into dimensions. Also, the students' responses with and without guided questions will be compared in order to analyse the difference in terms of depth.

Hence, in this section, I will discuss the development of students' responses using journal writing and how the guided questions helped shape their responses towards the literary texts.

Physical Attributes Of Journal Entries

In this section, the journal entries produced by the students' will be analysed based on its' physical attributes. Firstly, the entries will be analysed in terms of length and then in terms of the discourse used by the students. Also, a comparison of both the non-guided and guided journal entries will be made.

Length Of Journal Entries

Many students resist writing as it has been treated as a place to "display their command of spellmanship, penmanship and grammar" (Calkins, 1986). In order to make the journal writing activity more reasonable and to ensure that the students are more positive towards the task, the researcher did not include a writing condition in terms of the length of the journal entry. However, in analysing the journal entries, the researcher found a difference in the length of the students' responses. The table below indicates the results of the word count of the journal entries that were written by the students.

Table 1 : *Word Count Of Students' Journal Entries*

	Short Story The Sound Machine		Poem The Road Not Taken	
	No Guide	Guided Questions	No Guide	Guided Questions
High Proficiency Students				
Angeline	225	429	198	433
Savitha	239	381	159	446
Ann	356	449	285	642
Low Proficiency Students				
Zaiful	111	296	128	251
Mira	151	308	89	223
Alex	87	247	113	125

Based on the table above, it is evident that the high proficiency students were able to write longer with and without guided questions compared to the low proficiency students. The least number of words for the journal entries without guide for the high proficiency students was 159 while for the low proficiency students it was only 87.

On the other hand, for the journal entries with guided questions, the highest number of words for the high proficiency students was 642 compared to 296 for the low proficiency students.

The data clearly indicate that the high proficiency students wrote more than the low proficiency students even when there were no guided questions. This is most probably due to their good command in the language, which allowed them to be more comfortable in a creative writing activity such as journal-writing even when there were no guided questions. However, all six students wrote longer entries when they were provided with the guided questions.

When questioned during the interview (Appendix L & M), the students claimed that the questions helped in guiding them to write. Savitha reflected that "...without the questions, I was totally blur and did not have much to say, but with the questions, I knew what to write...". Angeline felt that the questions helped her write more as whenever she was "...stuck..." she could "...always look back at the questions...".

The three low proficiency students also stated that the condition in the guided task which required them to attempt at least one question from the four sections made it necessary for them to write more. Mira and Zaiful sheepishly smiled and admitted that if there had been no such condition, then they may have only attempted the section that required them to state their feelings towards the text and the characters as this was the simplest question.

Based on the above analysis, it is clearly evident that both the high and low proficiency students were able to write more with the guided questions as they helped give the students more ideas on what to write. This is especially so among the

low proficiency students whose entries where they had the guided questions were double in length.

The only exception was Alex as there wasn't much difference in the length of his journal entries on the poem for both with and without guide. When questioned, he gave this reason:

Poems aren't very easy to write about... the short story was not the one that I liked best, but I like Klausner...I can understand his problem...

In fact, it is interesting to note that all three low proficiency students wrote less in their response to the poem as they felt that short stories are easier to understand. According to Protherough (1983), the narrative mode is more popular as stories mirror our life experiences and thus it is easier for the reader to relate to.

From these views expressed, it is evident that the development of the students' responses is aided by the guided questions. However, their responses may be influenced by their perception towards a particular genre. The increase in the journal entry length also shows an increase in the development of students' responses towards the literary texts. Not only will the students' develop new thoughts and opinion towards the literary texts, but they will also show a development in terms of written discourse.

Students' Discourse In Journal Entries

In activities such as journal-writing, which require students to write expressively, their development can also be analysed in terms of language. In this section, the students' journal entries are analysed according to the written discourse. According to Craig (1983), by writing expressively, their language becomes more lyrical and metaphorical.

Thus, the journal entries were analysed for stylistic and expressive language such as idiomatic expressions, proverbs and interesting vocabulary, terms and phrases.

The journal entries of the high proficient students showed that these students had interesting expressions in their entries for both with and without guide. However, there were definitely more of such expressions in their entries that were written with the guided questions. The longer they wrote, the more expressive they became in terms of their written language.

One good example would be Angeline's journal entry (Appendix F) with the guided questions, which had liberal doses of expressive vocabulary, idioms and proverbs such as:

"...you should never judge a person by his looks..." "...true colours..."

"...looks can be deceiving..." "...fickle as a pickle..."

"...if it comes back to you, it's yours for sure..." etc.

The same could be seen in Ann's (Appendix H) and Savitha's (Appendix G) entries where they had expressive terms such as:

"...perceptions of life..." "...tempting alternatives..."

"...strikes a chord..." "...essence of decision-making..."

"...honesty is good for the soul..." etc.

Similarly, the low proficiency students also came up with more interesting terms when they wrote longer entries using the guided questions although definitely less when compared to the high proficiency students. Although Zaiful's entry (Appendix I) had grammatical and spelling errors, it had some interesting discourse that showed progress in the level of maturity in terms of language. For example:

"...flying colour..." "...disturbance circumstances..." "...genius..."

Mira and Alex too showed progress in their entries written with guided questions in terms of the discourse used:

"...agreasif person..." "...nobody perfect..." "...respect enviroment..."
 "...the best thing come not easy..." "...plan time propely..." etc.

From this analysis, it is clearly evident that chances of students' producing stylistic expressions in terms of discourse in their response is better when they write more as they need to use the language in order to express more ideas and opinions. This is possible if they have questions to guide them when writing their response.

The Dimensions Of Response Towards Literary Texts

In this section, an analysis of the students' journal entries where they were required to write down their response to the two literary texts, the short story *The Sound Machine* and the poem *The Road Not Taken* will be presented. In examining the journal entries, the students' responses were analysed according to three dimensions: the affective response, the connective response and the reflective response. In each dimension, the students' responses in the journal-writing activity for with and without guide were also analysed.

Affective Response

The data analysed showed that feelings played a prominent part in the students' responses. Their responses contained their emotional reaction towards the texts such as their likes, dislikes and feelings towards certain characters or events in the text. Aesthetic reading requires the students' to feel and experience the text and the affective response indicates that the students' are able to make emotional connections with the texts.

According to Rosenblatt (1978), students become more discriminating readers and are able to pass mature judgements, only after they are allowed to interact emotionally with the text. Thus, such emotional involvement is important as they will deepen the meaning of the text for them. This, in return, will help them understand the text better.

It was interesting to note that all three low proficiency students had included their affective response in their journal entries without guide. When questioned, they said that they assumed that the journal-writing activity required them to state whether they liked or found the text interesting. However, it is the depth of their response that differs.

The analysis of the journal entry without guide for the low proficiency students shows them giving brief responses as to why they felt thus towards the texts and the characters but without clear and in-depth explanations.

Zaiful wrote that he found the poem interesting because "...it's teach me how to make a decision in my life...". Alex on the other hand briefly stated that the poem made him "...felt more anxiety..." and "...fear..." at the thought of making choices. Mira only wrote that she found *The Sound Machine* unique because of the main character. This view was supported by Alex who described Klausner as wonderful, responsible and concluded that he "...respect Klausner...".

In contrast, their affective response in the guided journal entries were more in-depth and showed them making greater emotional connections with the texts. In responding to the poem, Zaiful explained that he felt "...sad because the writer cannot choose both of the road...".

Mira, on the other hand, expressed her fear that the poet may have chosen the wrong road. She elaborated by stating that she feels it is very important to make the

right choice as it will affect your future - whether "...your future are going right or wrong...". Only Alex did not have anything much to write other than stating that he found the poem interesting.

According to Burns (1999) "literature offers a look at characters of depth whom we can admire or despise with a passion...". Thus, it was interesting to note that all three low proficiency students empathized with Klausner and tried to provide answers to happenings in the short story. Zaiful stated that he likes Klausner as he "...can be a creative scientist or inventor that will be remember for years to come...". Mira also sympathised with Klausner's inability to prove his theory and so expressed her disappointment with the ending of the story.

Alex was more explicit and claimed that the story made him feel "scared and horrified" especially in the scene where Dr Scott is forced to apply iodine on the tree. He also attempted to explain the doctor's action as due to Klausner holding the axe.

The analysis of the high proficiency students' responses in their journal entries without guide showed that while some gave very emotional responses, others did not. Savitha did not include any affective elements in her response to the poem but went on straight to the message in the text. However, she empathised with the character in *The Sound Machine* and expressed her unhappiness by questioning "...why is it so difficult for people to accept or believe someone who has created something?...".

Ann too expressed her sympathy towards Klausner. She compared him to inventors such as Thomas Edison and stated that she "...admired the determination and grit that he possessed...". She also briefly expressed her empathy towards the poet's undecisiveness when he had to choose between two alternatives.

It is Angeline who presented a very highly-emotional response by stating that *The Sound Machine* is "...an uninteresting reading material and a waste of time...and not worth reading...". In fact, her response to this text covered only the affective dimension. When questioned, she said that this was her least favourite story and it took a few readings before she found it "ok". As for the poem, she lamented on her predicament as to what to write and ended up by saying "...I don't really seem to understand what I'm saying!...".

In comparison, these high proficiency students have clearly shown a stronger transaction with the texts in their responses in their guided journal entries. They have expressed more in-depth affective responses by giving interesting and clear explanations. In order to fully evoke the story world, these students established contact with the characters and took on a variety of perspectives.

Perspective-taking is a highly complex social-cognitive process that entails one to consider what someone else might be seeing, thinking or feeling. This requires the students to recall their own experience and relate it to another person and consider the most likely experiences and interpretation the other might have/take in this situation. The data showed these high proficiency students applying the use of mutual perspective-taking where they adopted a third-party view on the characters in the texts.

Both Angeline and Savitha expressed their empathy toward Klausner and their frustration and surprise with the ending of the short story as Klausner was unable to prove his theory. Savitha went on to say

"I expected this story to end with Klausner's victory but it turned out to be the other way round."

All three high proficiency students also voiced their annoyance at Mrs Saunders' reaction towards Klausner. Ann, who claimed that even she has difficulty accepting people who are different from the norm, started to question herself :

"What if I was different from others? How would others perceive me?
How would I feel?".

As for Angeline, she rationalised Mrs Saunders' behaviour by saying :

To me, Mrs Saunders portrays the outlook of the people of today. Afraid to know and approach the unknown or different people, all tied up in their little box of thinking and always trying to be in the norm.

In attempting to articulate her response, Angeline has not only involved herself intellectually and sensorially but also emotionally.

In responding to the poem, all three expressed their admiration at the "graceful" and "beautiful" language. In fact, Ann quoted lines from the poem that she felt were interesting to illustrate this. A vast improvement was evident in Angeline's journal entry with guided questions for the poem. Here, she expressed her admiration on the persona's decision to choose a path "...and live by it..." and came to a conclusion that "...we should never live in the shadow of regret nor should we be hesitant to make a decision...".

In analysing the journal entries with and without guide, it is evident that all six participants were able to express their empathy towards the texts and briefly express their feelings even in the unguided activity. However, both the high and low proficiency students have given more in-depth response in their entries where there were guided questions by including evidence from the texts and analysing actions and events. This is important as Rosenblatt (1978) encourages purely personal response as starting points that need to progress to include evidence of stronger transaction with the text.

The above analysis also indicates that affective response is common and natural among both the high and low proficiency students as all six students had included this dimension in their journals without guide.

Based on Thomson's (1987) developmental model (Appendix E), when students produce affective response, they are at Level 2 as they have begun connecting to the text and are not just narrating information from the text. This indicates that the students' have gone beyond efferent reading as their affective response shows that they have already begun to respond aesthetically to the texts. Beach (1993) goes on to state that *engaging in the text affectively can lead to enhanced cognitive understanding*. This is apparent in the next dimension of response - the connective response.

Connective Response

This experiential form of response requires the students to experience the story world and to step back and reflect on the experience. Here, they are encouraged to make explicit connections between their personal experiences to those of characters in the texts. This is done when they bring their life to literature and in doing so, the literary texts are brought to life. Thus, students make connections between the literary texts and their lives.

In analysing the responses of the low proficiency students in the journal-writing activity without guide, it was noted that not all of them were able to make connections between literature and life. One of them would be Alex who was unable to make any connective response to both the short story and the poem.

Mira, too seemed to have difficulty in this dimension. She briefly wrote that the poem made her realise that she must "...be prepared to face risks if she makes a

choice without any research...". It is Zaiful who has managed to relate the text to his life even without the guided questions. He compared the message in the poem to an incident in his life where he had to make a decision between matriculation and Pre-University.

It's a hard decision to choose wisely...According to the poem also, I cannot regret or come back to choose matriks. Once I choose, I cannot turn back because it leads to my future....

As for the short story, Zaiful stated that he has learnt the "never give up" attitude from Klausner and that he will adopt it in his life.

For the journal entry with guided questions, again Alex was only able to give a very short response. For both the short story and poem, Alex explained briefly on what he has learnt from the text and how this message has influenced his beliefs "...as it can be applied to daily routine...". Alex can be termed as a less engaged reader as he seemed unable to bring his personally lived experience to the literary texts. He confirmed this in the interview (Appendix M) where he stated that he found the question "What do you relate to?" the most difficult.

It is Mira who has shown greater in-depth response in this dimension. With the guided questions, Mira has explicitly connected her personal experiences to those of the characters and stated that the reading experience has influenced the choices and actions that she has taken in her life. For example, in her response to the poem, she compared the message in the text to her decision in opting for the Science stream in Form 4. She elaborated on this and wrote

I should dare to take a risk...The message...reminds me sometimes our chosen is the best for our life but we need to be confident to our self because the best thing come not easy we need to be dare to take a risk...

Not only has she brought life to the literary text by making a personal comparison, she has also brought the literary text to life by formulating the idea about daring to take risks.

As for the short story, again, Mira made explicit connections between her personal experiences and that of Klausner and in doing so, has managed to connect the text to her own life. Here, she compared Klausner to her cousin, a 27-year-old mentally retarded girl, and wrote how the message in the text has influenced her understanding of her cousin.

I don't care, she is special and had a authority like normal people has. I proud of her. And, when I realise that the moral of this story, I swear to myself to do not tease her anymore.

Thus, Mira has succeeded in bringing her life to literature. This has been made possible by the guided questions, which was a form of scaffolding. These guided questions have helped her think, thus making it possible for her to give a more in-depth response which will lead to a greater understanding of the text.

Effective questioning has great potential in stimulating the reader's critical and creative thinking skills. Questions that stimulate students' thinking can help create new zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). Mira's response clearly indicates that with effective questioning, even low proficiency students can connect literature to life.

In analysing the high proficiency students' responses for the journal activity without guide, it is evident that all three students were easily able to connect the poem to life. Ann and Savitha's responses showed their understanding of the message in the text and the lessons that they have learnt from it.

Savitha briefly stated how the poem has made her aware that decision-making is not easy as the choices made would somehow affect her for the rest of her life. Ann's response clearly indicates that she is a highly engaged reader as even without the guided questions, she has shown in-depth responses. Her ability to use actual-world knowledge, in ways invited by textual clues, to build a virtual world as how most highly engaged readers naturally do is evident in her response.

She wrote :

I have also been at crossroads in my life when it seems difficult to make a choice especially when I cannot see into the future...The process of decision making is not easy because I have to ponder, reflect and not be hasty to weigh the consequences of my decision today...Choices I make today can make or break me significantly in the future. Who I will be tomorrow is a result of my decision today.

Angeline's response without the guided questions also shows her potential as a highly engaged reader. In her response to the poem, she interrogated herself and her decisions thus indicating heightened awareness of her identity. She questions herself:

...I can't help but wonder what if I had done something in a different way...Would things have been different? Did I make the right decision? How much would it affect my life? Would my life be better if I had taken the other road?...

By consciously relating or connecting to the text, Angeline has not only brought her life to the text but has also infused some "personal extratextual life into the reading experience" (Wilhelm, 1997).

Surprisingly, Angeline was unable to connect *The Sound Machine* to life without the guided questions. This may be due to her personal opinion of the short story. It was also interesting to note that in trying to connect the short story to life, both Ann and Savitha focussed on different issues and conflicts that were depicted in

the text. Savitha was more concerned with the rights of every living thing, including plants. She went on to say

In this story, readers get to know that each time we chop down a tree, it endures pain where most of us think that trees do not feel anything. It makes me wonder, is it wise to hurt trees so much just because we want its benefits?

Ann, on the other hand, focussed on Klausner and how the doubts that people had on him helped her formulate guidelines for personal ways of living. She wrote

...there are people who doubt, criticise or discourage us...It is during these times that we have to be steadfast and sure of what we believe in...you should not allow these disappointments or failures to dampen your spirit...

This clearly proves the reader-response theory, that readers comprehend the texts differently due to their individuality and uniqueness. Thus, multiple responses are likely to occur as these students come from diverse worlds.

With the guided questions, all three high proficiency students, even Angeline, were able to connect both the literary texts to life. However, here, it is the depth of the response that differs when compared to their response without guided questions. Using the questions as a guideline, Angeline was able to connect the short story to her life and produced thought-provoking insights into her response. While discussing Mrs Saunders reaction to Klausner, Angeline articulated her beliefs on serious issues such as identity and individuality by saying

...everyone should be different, unique and that is how God intended the world to be...we should not distant ourselves from people who are different...but should try to understand them...Why do people always put down those who are unique in their own way?...

Finally, she went on to compare Klausner's predicament to the main character in the movie "*Edward Scissorshand*". Here, Angeline has used her knowledge of the movie to make intertextual links. Ann, too does the same in her guided journal

response for the poem. She compared the decision-making theme in the poem to the television series "The Amazing Race" where the participants were given options.

According to Iser (1978) elaboration is the key to personal understanding gained through reading. These intertextual links are elaborations that went beyond the literary texts in order to create meaning and sharpen their understanding of it. Thus, their presence indicate that the students were able to make the meaning more powerful and personal.

The data analysed in this section indicate that while some students are able to connect literary texts to their life easily, some however, do need guidance in order to do so. This includes both high and low proficiency students. With the guided questions, the high proficiency students had no difficulty in connecting the literary texts to life. Their proficiency in the language helped them express new insights that were thought-provoking.

As for the low-proficiency students, although there was some improvement, the data indicate that not all low-proficiency students will be able to produce connective response even with the presence of guided questions. Alex is a clear indication of this. However, it was heartening to note the great improvement in Mira's response in the journal writing with guided questions. This clearly indicates that these guided questions do have a good chance in helping the low proficiency students towards applying their own experience to the literary texts, thus connecting literature to life.

According to Thomson's Developmental Model (Appendix E), students who are able to make connections between their lives and the literary texts are at Level 3. Although some of these students were able to respond at this level without guide,

with the guided questions, all three high proficiency students and two of the low proficiency students were able to respond at a greater depth in this level.

This clearly indicates that with the guided questions, both the high and low proficiency students can develop their response to a higher level and thus attain Level 3 in the developmental model.

In order for students to proceed to the next level of response, they need to travel from "unconscious enjoyment to conscious delight" (Thomson, 1987). This requires them to introspect and reflect on all that the text has to offer them which in turn will help them develop a more matured response - the reflective response.

Reflective Response

Reflective response requires the reader to have a keen awareness of the form of the text and the effect this form has on them. Here, the students begin to speculate on the reading experience and reflect on it. They notice details in the text and their significances and they begin to question or interrogate the text. In doing so, they are evaluating the text and the author.

The analysis of the response of the low proficiency students in the journal writing activity without guide indicate that all three students were unable to respond in this dimension. However, with the guided questions they have attempted to write down their reflective response.

Both Mira and Zaiful did state in the interview that they found this the hardest section. According to Zaiful "...it is difficult to question the writer..." while Mira stated that to answer these questions, she had to frequently refer to the texts. In his written response, Alex, as usual, was very brief. He merely stated the message

contained in both the short story and the poem. He added that the writer of the short story had ended the text in such a way so as to "...create suspense for the readers...".

Mira, too, stated the message that she learnt from both the texts. Interestingly, her response in *The Sound Machine* showed her noticing the ending of the short story. She expressed her disappointment that the falling branch destroyed Klausner's invention and her reason being "...the doctor...can't hear sound from the Sound Machine...". However, she was unable to elaborate on the significance of this event or explain why the writer may have chosen to end the text in this way:

Zaiful, however, did come up with his own explanation to the destruction of the machine. According to him, the writer did not want the machine to exist as

"...it will be difficult for humans to live with nature environments. Humans will be more sympathetic to nature..."

Zaiful also questioned the doctor's decision to judge Klausner as crazy as he felt that he should be more supportive as they have a strong relationship. Not only has Zaiful interrogated and reflected on the text but he has also filled in the gaps by elaborating on the details in the text.

Thus, with the help of the guided questions, Zaiful has managed to proceed to Level 4 which requires him to make his own interpretation based on his reading. This clearly proves that with significant questions even low proficiency students can be encouraged to make personal discoveries.

The analysis of the high proficiency students' response for the journal activity without guide reveals that there is an attempt by Ann and Savitha to reflect on the texts but not Angeline. In their written response, both Ann and Savitha stated the message in both the texts and explained it clearly. They have also reflected on these messages by trying to connect it to their lives.

For example, both Ann and Savitha wrote that the poet made them aware that any decisions made would have an impact on their lives. Ann agrees with the writer's opinion on this and states

"...who I will be tomorrow is a result of my decision today...I will have to accept the consequences of my choice and not dwell on the past..."

Similarly, both girls wrote their interpretation on the message in the short story and expressed their agreement with what the writer was trying to convey. While Savitha reflected on the importance of conserving nature, Ann argued on the need to accept people for who they are.

With the guided questions, all three high proficiency students, even Angeline, were able to move into reflective thinking and evaluation. Ann's response revealed that she has become more aware of the text as she questions the character's decision. For example, in *The Sound Machine*, Ann expressed her puzzlement on Klausner's decision to cut the tree and then try to "heal" it with iodine. She wrote

...why hurt the tree and then seek to heal or relieve the pain he inflicted on it. Why hurt it in the first place?

She ended by praising the writer's imaginative skills in adding thrill and bizarreness to the text.

In her response to the poem, Ann literally quoted lines from the poem that in her opinion were significant to the message in the text and explained them thoroughly. By taking into account more of the texts, Ann's interpretation carries more weight and shows a stronger transaction with the texts.

Savitha's response also shows greater interaction with the texts. She expressed her agreement to the poet's view on decision-making and has quoted and explained certain lines from the poem as clarification. She has also tried to evaluate

the poem and the poet's decision. According to her, the poet began the poem in such a way as to evoke curiosity in the reader and to attract attention. She wrote

...he wants to attract the reader's attention...to leave them in suspense...make them want to read more...to make the reader curious. Curious on which option the persona chose, was it the right choice and so on.

This is interesting as Savitha has made a conscious effort to rationalise and evaluate the poet's decision. As for the short story, Savitha questions the character's decision and attempts to explain why she felt it was unacceptable

...you can't just think that a person is crazy just because they talk of something you don't understand. Maybe if Mrs Saunders was more open-minded, she would not conclude Klausner is crazy after all.

Similarly, Angeline too expressed her dissatisfaction towards Mrs Saunders' reaction towards Klausner. She reflected

Everyone should have a chance to show their true colours and not be judged by the first glimpse...

Angeline, who had earlier expressed her frustration towards the ending of the short story, reasoned that

It was quite predictable that in the end the people of the world would be unable to know or use Klausner's invention because of the way or flow of the story which shows the reaction of Mrs Saunders towards Klausner and his machine.

Thus, with the help of the guided questions, all three high proficiency students have tried to reflect and interpret the texts by recognising details and considering their significances.

The data in this section indicate that there is a higher chance for the high proficiency students to progress towards reflective thinking and evaluation of the text which is Level 4 and 5 in the Thomson's Developmental Model. However, they

do need questions that would stimulate their critical thinking skills and allow them to give more in-depth response as in the case of Ann and Savitha.

As for the low proficiency students, the questions are a necessity as without them there is less chance of these students progressing to reflective thinking. It is the depth of their response that will differ when compared to the high proficiency students. However, there will still be students like Alex who are unable to progress even with the presence of the guided questions.

This section has discussed the dimensions of response produced by the students in the guided and unguided journal writing activity. In tracing the development of the students' response, the discussion seems to suggest that with the presence of guided questions, both the high and low proficiency students would be able to progress to a higher level of response and write in-depth responses.

Students' Perception Towards Journal Writing

In this section, the views of the participants regarding the use of journal writing in helping them develop in-depth response were obtained through the interview. Both the high and low proficiency students felt that using journal writing as an activity to encourage response towards literary texts would be beneficial as it would help learning be more meaningful.

However, all six students were of the opinion that guided questions should be included in this activity as it helped them respond better and at a higher level.

The students' comments on this activity, which will be discussed and presented, revolved around these central ideas : journal writing as a strategy in improving understanding of literary texts, enhancing in-depth response to literary texts and promoting greater critical thinking skills.

Improving Understanding Of Literary Texts

Fuhler (1994) believed that "by putting thoughts in paper, students are better able to recognise and understand them". This view is shared by Kletzien and Hushion (1992) who wrote that by writing down their response, readers are able to explore and extend their understanding of what they have read.

The students' reaction towards the use of journal writing in improving their understanding of the literary texts was very positive. All six stated that the activity helped them understand the issues and concerns better. This, they felt, enabled them to relate better to the characters and events in the texts which led them to have a deeper understanding of the text. Mira, a low proficiency student had this to say :

I understand more because I have to analyse and I have to write down. When I write down and read it again, I understand better.

Savitha confirmed that she too understood the text better after this activity and she stated the reasons

I had to think more about the story, the themes and other aspects before writing and when I'm not so sure, I would refer to the books. This helped me to understand better.

Their improved understanding was due to their ability to think more deeply about the texts and the students state that this was due to the guided questions which encouraged them to feel, connect and reflect on the texts more deeply.

According to the students, the questions helped them to be more focussed when they read thus increasing their understanding of the texts. The questions made them think deeper about the text thus improving their understanding of the texts. As such, they felt that journal writing with guided questions would be beneficial in helping students understand the literary texts better.

Enhancing In-depth Response To Literary Texts

By encouraging the students to write their personal responses, they began to make connections between the literary texts and their life. This made meaning-making more personalised, thus enriching their response to the texts. The students viewed the use of guided journal writing positively as it helped them develop more powerful responses to the texts read. Without the questions, they assumed that they were required to write the summary of the text and their feelings about it but with the questions they realised that responding required them to delve deeper into the texts.

During my observation, I did note that the students seemed clearer and more confident in writing their responses with the guided questions. My informal chats with them made me realise that they were very doubtful and unsure on how to attempt this task without the presence of the guided questions. The students confirmed this in the interviews (Appendix L & M).

Alex remarked that he felt more confident in writing down his responses with the help of the guided questions as he knew what to focus on. Mira too agreed that it was the guided questions that helped her respond better to the texts as she felt less confused and "knew what to write". In short, the questions actually helped them know how to respond and make meaning.

Savitha spoke highly of the use of the guided journal writing in helping her respond better. According to her, the questions helped her analyse the issues and concerns from a personal viewpoint

I was able to connect issues in the texts with real life with the help of the guided questions. I could connect incidents in my life to the texts and this did not happen before. This helped me broaden my view and to look at things in a different way...writing helps understand the texts better which will help them give more matured responses.

According to Gambrell (1996) students develop deeper understandings by relating what they have read to their own personal experiences and this would help them write in-depth responses. This is in line with the reader-response theory which takes into account the students' personal response to a text by allowing the texts to be relevant to the students' life (Iser, 1978).

It is Ann who managed to eloquently explain how the guided questions helped her write more in-depth responses

I began to see the texts not just at the surface level. Instead the questions probed me to look at the texts in a different aspects. It made me analyse a person's actions. *I started wondering what would I do in their shoes.*

All said and done, there were still some reservations towards the use of journal writing in eliciting response towards literary texts. Savitha remarked that not all students might be positive, as this is not an easy activity. She then suggested that students be allowed to choose their own texts as then they may respond better. According to her

If you like literature, it'll be fun but if you don't you may not even like to write in the journals.

In this study, Alex is a clear example of a student whose response did not improve even with the help of guided questions. When asked, he admitted that the questions were not difficult but he still found himself unable to respond. This revealed a need to analyse and adapt the question frame so that it would suit both the highly and less engaged students before it can be meaningful and beneficial to all.

Promoting Critical Thinking Skills

The reader-response theory allows room for creativity and reflective thinking. Here, students have an opportunity to reflect on the texts and on the meaning of their life. According to Kim (2002), journal writing allows students to reflect on and internalize the meaning they have gathered from the text at different moments. By writing down their response to literary texts, students are learning to construct meaning; they are further developing their ability to think critically (Shanahan, 1988).

All six students stated that they had to think more before writing in their journals. According to them, the guided questions made it necessary for them to do so. Some of the low proficiency students' comments were

I had to think back about the text...It trains students to think...I have to think carefully about the character before I write...why I like him...I must think critically and analyse. I cannot just write the summary of the story...

Their opinions imply that the questions triggered more ideas, clarified their thinking and made them reflect on it. The high proficiency students supported this view.

Angeline explained thus

The questions helped me focus on the issues. When there were no questions, I'll just be staring at a blank sheet of paper thinking hard on what to write next. So, the questions actually stimulate your thinking.

Thus, the questions have actually helped lead the students towards transaction with the text. Here they have constructed, interpreted and reflected on the meaning contained in the texts. This has made them progress to higher levels of thinking and a richer understanding of the texts.

Protherough (1991) describes these students as having moved from passive readers to readers who take time to think about, wonder and reflect upon what they

have read. Critical and reflective thinking would inevitably lead to richer understanding of the literary texts thus leading to in-depth response to the texts. As Ann, one of the high proficiency students aptly said

The questions help me evaluate and reflect on the meaning of the texts. This allows me to engage with the texts. I was then able to relate to my own experiences which helped me discover new things about the world around me...I needed to think critically...

Conclusion

This study has attempted to uncover insights in the development of students' response towards literary texts using journal writing. In this chapter, I have attempted to analyse and discuss their written response in the journal writing activity. What I have sought to do here is to uncover the developmental process of both the high and low proficiency students in writing their responses towards literary texts with and without the guided questions.

Thus, these students' progress in the development of response with and without the guided questions has been analysed and discussed. In so doing, I have captured the students' authentic response and analysed their progress, thus noting the need for adult assistance in aiding students, whether high or low proficient, to exceed their zone of proximal development. In the next chapter, I will summarize the key findings that emerged in this study and discuss their pedagogical implications for teaching literary texts in the ESL classroom.