CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines the methodology utilised in investigating the use of performance in developing student responses to literature in an ESL class. The first section explicates the research design framing this naturalistic inquiry (Gay, 1981). It also describes the research site and the key participants of the study. In addition, I adopted the emic and etic perspectives (Freeman, 1998) to capture both the outsider and insider perspectives of the research site and participants to elicit richer data about participant responses to the teaching and learning of literature. Both perspectives have been utilised in analysing and presenting my findings. I also explicated methods used to collect and analyse the data.

3.1 The Research Design

I chose a qualitative case study approach for my study. A qualitative case study is an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a programme, an institution, a person, a process or a social unit” (Merriam, 1990, p. xiv). As there is a dearth of case studies done on literature-based ESL classes in Malaysia, I was keen to obtain a holistic perspective and a deeper understanding of the use of performance to shape student responses to literature. Besides this process-oriented design foregrounds the exploration of meaning making and the generating of insights in the context of a classroom. The case study orientation allowed me to explore the activities in-the-classroom as well as out-of-the classroom and actively seek to understand the see pages, influences, interactions between participants as well as address the fluidity and uncertainties that exist in the site thus informing and enhancing my professional practice. “Thick description” (Gertz, 1977) was utilised to describe, interpret and analyse the... descriptive data in terms of cultural norms,

3.2 The Research Site

The primary site for the study was the class. However, in order to understand the dynamics of the class, I needed to see it within the larger contexts of school and community.

3.2.1 The Community

The research setting is the bustling town of Klang. Geographically, the town enjoys a strategic position. The Klang river dissected the town into two neat halves, Klang North and Klang South. Two, concrete bridges serve as vital lifelines to connect Klang North which is the modern, business and entertainment side of town with Klang South which is the staid, administrative and educational quarter.

One unique feature of the town is the presence of three distinct ethnic enclaves located in close proximity. Most rich Malays reside in the housing estates in town while the others live in government quarters and in villages such as Kampung Delek and Kampung Jawa. The Indians take pride in Rembau Street which has been labelled “Little India”. The visitors’ senses will be saturated with the lilting melodies of Hindi and Tamil songs, a tempting spread of Indian dishes and vibrant hued Indian garments. The five temples devoted to the Hindu deities also see an influx of devotees during religious occasions. The Chinese community resides mainly in the affluent housing estate of Southern Park. Taiping Street is a haven for tourists interested in Chinese food and handicraft. The mixed population of Klang is distinguished by three social classes. One third of the people belong to the upper and upper-middle class comprising the professionals and company directors. Another third consists of the middle class who are civil servants and technical staff. The final third is made up of the working class and includes retirees and labourers.
3.2.2 The School

The school selected for the study is *Sri Murni*, an elite girls secondary school located in Klang South. The names of the school, class and participants are pseudonyms. *Sri Murni* is one of two secondary schools located about a kilometre from the heart of town. The imposing multi-storey Town Council building and the Klang District Office perched on a hillock to the north of the school are among the landmarks which feature in many school-based student projects.

The school building comprises four concrete blocks which have been painted beige, yellow, white and grey respectively. It sits on a five hectare site owned by the Methodist church. A stately palm-lined route leads visitors to the school entrance. Multi coloured murals adorn the walls encircling the school. The school, in line with the "school in a garden" concept has a Japanese garden and rock gardens with mini waterfalls which enhance the aesthetic appeal of the school.

The school which was set up by the Methodist mission in 1924 to provide sound educational opportunities for girls has a student body of 1,760, a teaching staff of 72, four administrators including the principal and ten non-academic staff. *Sri Murni* operates in two sessions. The morning session caters to students in Forms Three to Upper Six totalling 26 classes while the afternoon session has 16 classes of Forms One and Two students. The students come from the affluent sections of town like Berkeley Garden as well as the poorer, outskirts of town like *Kampung Jawa*.

This institution has established a reputation for its academic and extra curricular successes. The students have consistently been obtaining outstanding performances in the *PMR, SPM* and *STPM* examinations. They have also set records in extra curricular activities including netball and hockey at the district, state and national levels. The students are also very active in English language and literature-based activities. They have achieved success in
debates, public speaking and story telling competitions at the district and state levels. The school team holds the record for being the district choral speaking champions for five consecutive years. The school team represented the state at the national choral speaking competition in the year 2000. In addition the students have staged school plays and musicals including Macbeth, The Importance of Being Earnest, Wuthering Heights and Aladdin.

The school's motto "With God We Labour" and the present administration's mission "We practise the culture of excellence" are aimed at motivating the students to strive for greater heights in academic and extra curricular activities. In line with this notion, every room and corridor of the school are inscribed with bilingual motivational lines.

The students are conversant in Bahasa Malaysia, the English Language as well as their mother tongues namely the Chinese dialect of Hokkien as well as Tamil. These adolescents indulged in surfing the Internet and perused teenage romance texts. They griped about teachers, parents and the numerous tuition classes they attended. The students also articulated strong opinions on issues of gender equality and career opportunities.

3.2.3 The Selected Class

The Form Four students were the second batch of students to study the prescribed texts for the fourth cycle of the Literature in English elective. (Refer to the Appendix 2 for the list of texts). The selection of the class form four Harapan was purposeful (Merriam, 1990) as it was the only form four class that was allowed to take the subject for the SPM examination. An investigation of the class enabled the researcher to discover and cull insights and a better understanding of the teaching and learning of literature especially through probing the strategies and activities utilized in and out-of-class that would generate and shape student responses to literature.
The class enrolment stood at 24. The form four H class was a multi-racial class comprising 14 Chinese, 8 Indian and 2 Malay students. As Malay Literature and Literature in English were taught simultaneously, most of the Malay girls from this class joined their counterparts in form four Teratai while three non Malay students from that class attended literature lessons in form four H.

The form four H classroom is located in Block D, adjacent to the school office. It has two large brown wooden windows, two wooden doors and grey hued walls. Multicoloured curtains frame the windows and add a touch of cheer and domesticity to the class. However, the sun’s heat was barely alleviated by the two ceiling fans in the class.

The majority of the students come from the middle and lower-middle class homes while a handful are from the upper-middle class. Many students communicate with their peers in Bahasa Malaysia or English but often indulge in code switching in their mother tongues during animated chats with their friends in between lessons or in the canteen. The learners have varying levels of proficiency in English. Some are highly competent and participate actively in literature-based activities while others can barely articulate their responses in English. Many are shy and perceive the articulation of their responses in class a daunting one. However, the students were very vocal when their opinions on movie stars and divas were sought by the researcher. Some students were seen passing notes surreptitiously to their peers or observing the activities outside their classroom even during lessons.

### 3.3 The Selected Participants

The criteria for selecting the key participants of the study was based on purposive sampling (Merriam, 1990). The sole teacher who teaches literature in the school and four students of diverse ethnic, religious, cultural groups and socio-economic status were selected as key participants of the study. The students’ command of the language also differed.
Approval from the relevant "gatekeepers" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) namely the Educational Policy and Research Division (EPRD) of the Education Ministry and the State Education Department were obtained before gaining access to the research site. After getting permission from the principal the researcher began visiting the site.

The key participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, the benefits and risks of participating in the research prior to obtaining their fully informed consent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.3.1 The Teacher Participant

The teacher participant in the study, Mrs Sanam was the only literature teacher in Sri Murni while all the English Language teachers taught the language focussing on grammar and vocabulary. This teacher pursued her degree in TESL at the University of Malaya after a two year teaching stint at a primary school in Kelantan. Mrs Sanam has been teaching literature to the forms four and five students in Sri Murni for two years.

This 35 year old Sikh classroom practitioner has a teacher-spouse and a two year old son. We shared our literature learning and teaching experiences in the staff room and in the canteen. She was the Drama club advisor and we discussed the play scripts based on the literary texts to be used for the drama competition in July 2002. Our decision was based on the notion that the students would be familiar with the scripts. I agreed to undertake genre transformation by writing the play script for the short story, The Man From Kabul.

3.3.2 The Student Key Participants

In this section, I describe the four key student participants. I opted for purposive sampling (Merriam, 1990) after talking to several students in the class. Participants were selected on the basis of their involvement in activities in class as well as in literature-based activities outside class. They were also chosen based on their PMR results, and the first
monthly test results, their ability to articulate their ideas in English as well their varied ethnic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. The profiles of key student participants are detailed below.

**Christine.** Christine, is an impish and loquacious Chinese girl. This sixteen year old from an upper-middle class home is a talented student and actress. She has completed her Grade Seven pianoforte examination and is an active member of the Drama, Choir and Choral Speaking clubs.

She is the eldest of five siblings and was socialised into literary practices as a five year old by her teacher-mother. This medium built, cute and bubbly adolescent is always surrounded by her friends and can be seen exchanging the latest news with her friends. Christine, an avid reader of Jeffrey Archer’s tomes also nurtures a deep love for drama and choral speaking activities.

**Stella.** Stella, an Indian-Catholic is the youngest of three siblings. Her father is a retiree and her mother works as a beautician. She obtained 4As in the *PMR* examination and decided to take literature as she aspires to become a lawyer. This cheerful and friendly student is a budding actress who also reads popular fiction during her leisure time. Stella who sports a variety of hair styles weekly is an active member of the school choral speaking team and the drama club. She has participated in school plays for over two years.

**Mei Lee.** Mei Lee, is a bespectacled, serious, and an unassuming student. The second child of a banker-father and a homemaker mother is also a talented artist who has won numerous awards at the state and national levels. This diligent student is often found with her head buried in her books even while waiting for the commencement of lessons. She spoke only when spoken to but was willing to share her opinions about performance freely with the researcher. A devout Buddhist, she often spent her free time playing the piano.
Sri Devi. Sri Devi, is a medium built, bespectacled Indian girl. She is the only daughter of a university don and a lawyer. This participant is fluent in Tamil, English and Bahasa Malaysia. Sri Devi is a voracious reader of Hindu mythology and literary texts. This student has been actively involved in several literature-based activities since she was in form one. Sri Devi is an outstanding school debater, the president of the drama club and a member of the school choral speaking team. This year she volunteered to direct the dramatised version of The Man From Kabul for the drama competition. This multi-talented extrovert also bagged the best speaker award at the semi finals of the state level debate competition in June, 2002. It is a passion for drama that motivated this learner to study literature despite obtaining 6As in the PMR and being offered a place in the science stream.

Besides these principal key informants, four other peripheral informants were also interviewed and observed to obtain rich data about the study.

3.3.3 Duration of the Study

The duration of the study spanned three months, from April 2002 to June 2002. This did not include the time I spent immersing myself in the school ethos as well as building trust and rapport with my key informants. The researcher observed the literature lessons thrice a week during the two month stint. I observed the lessons on Mondays from 11.25 am to 12.10 pm, 10.55 am to 11.25 am on Wednesdays and from 11.35 am to 12.10 pm on Fridays. Twelve lessons were observed during this period. Discussions and training sessions for choral speaking spanned May and June. Drama practices commenced after the choral speaking competition. These activities were held in the afternoons on weekdays and in the mornings on Saturdays. I sometimes had to ‘camp’ in school to observe and record the lessons as well as the activities in the afternoons so as to cull rich data from the site.
3.4 Researcher Stances and Roles

This section would explicate the researcher's stances and roles in the site. It also traces my keen interest in undertaking the study which is related to my positioning in the site. I undertook a study on the use of performance in developing student responses to literature as I am a literature teacher myself and have a passionate interest in the subject. I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature and have been a classroom practitioner teaching the English Language and literature for 14 years. The enthusiasm and love for the language and literature displayed by the students of Sri Murni allowed me to explore an array of literature-based activities. I strongly believed that students who participated in these activities would be motivated to see the study of literature as an enjoyable one. Besides, the tradition of the school play was on the wane and I decided to rekindle and sustain their interest and love for this exciting activity by making it an annual affair.

After fourteen years, I decided it was time to enhance my professional development by enrolling for a Masters Degree Programme. I decided to research the use of performance in developing ESL student responses to literature for my project paper.

3.4.1 Researcher Roles

I performed multiple roles ranging from a teacher-researcher, counsellor, choral speaking and drama coach cum script writer as the study involved activities in and out-of-class.

My role of a teacher-researcher was performed in out-of-class activities. Teacher-researchers are concerned with "understanding what is going on in classroom teaching and learning and the knowledge established reflects those understandings" (Freeman, 1998). I was a researcher in Mrs Sanam's class. I sat through 12 lessons to obtain a better understanding of her perceptions of the teaching and learning of literature. I had obtained her permission to
observe her lessons and I talked to her after class and even at home to elicit more information pertaining to the study.

I coached the school debate team. I was also asked to help the choral speaking team. I scaffolded their practice sessions, made field notes and video taped these sessions to understand the students’ sense making of drama and poetry as they experimented with “sounding the text” (Brown, 1987) replete with gestures and movements. I also observed many drama sessions and assisted them with their interpretation and performance of the play, The Man From Kabul.

It was during these sessions that I established rapport with my participants and understood their lifeworlds, their interests, thoughts, feelings and idiosyncrasies. The interview sessions complemented my observation as they revealed more of their perceptions and opinions which were punctuated with giggles and animated gestures.

3.5. Data Collection

This section details the data collection techniques utilised in the study. The naturalistic study (Gay, 1981) involving data collection from plural sources in order to comprehend and obtain insights into the teaching and learning of literature in an ESL class. It allowed me to perceive the familiar activities that occur in the classroom and have been taken for granted with a researchers’ eyes and to discern the “strange” things with an insider’s lenses. It enabled the teacher-researcher to reflect and interpret the teaching and learning scenario differently.

In investigating the use of performance in developing student responses to literature, I also utilised the first and second order perspectives (Freeman, 1998). Both these perspectives meld the world of action and the world of perception to present a rich and holistic picture of the study (Freeman, 1998).
Data was obtained through interviews with key participants and peripheral participants, participant observation, samples of students’ work, journals and audio and video taped sessions of the activities so as to construct a comprehensive, and meaningful window into the world of the literature class.

3.5.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation was a vital tool used in the study as it allowed me to use myself as a “data source and build on tacit knowledge both (my) own and that of the group members” (Lincoln & Guba, 1995 p. 273). Twelve literature lessons and eight choral speaking and drama sessions were observed and field notes were recorded. The literature lessons were audio taped and transcribed on the same day to ensure that there were no missing data. The students’ and teacher’s talk and behaviour were observed in and out-of-class. It was done to ascertain their actions, discourses and perceptions as well as to perceive any dissonance in their oral and written discourses.

3.5.1 Teaching-Learning Materials

I also collected samples of students’ written responses and their journal entries, test scripts and copies of the teacher’s lesson plans to capture the voices of the participants and to obtain a better understanding of their responses to literature.

I observed lessons on the use of three literary texts namely a short story, a play and a poem. The literary texts used were Educating Rita by Willey Russel, The Lamp by Rashid Ngah, (translated by Barclay Newman), Children’s Song by R.S. Thomas.

3.5.2 Interviews

Interviews allowed the researcher to “walk a mile in the mind of the observed” (Patton, 1980). I interviewed the teacher and the student participants throughout the duration of the study. I conducted semi-structured and open-ended interviews with the
participants to elicit authentic, insider views about the use of performance in literature. The interviews also captured their perspectives on school experiences, life experiences and the study of literature.

The students were interviewed three times individually and in groups. The teacher was interviewed during her free periods to elicit in-depth responses to her views on the teaching and learning of literature. The interviews were transcribed the same day and the data was incorporated in the findings.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data Analysis was carried out in the site on an ongoing basis. However, an in-depth analysis of data was done after I had completed my data collection. I also wrote my “observer’s comments” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982) as I observed the activities in and out-of-class. I also noted my own hunches and questions in my journal to reflect upon as I proceeded with my observations.

I attempted to classify the data collected into categories which were then coded. The codes were analysed to generate new categories or to discard existing ones. This was to ensure no vital “data bits” (Dey, 1993) had been omitted. Patterns seen in the data were categorised.

The main data source was the field notes of literature activities in and out-of-the classroom. Student responses to the learning of literature were juxtaposed with the teacher’s perceptions and teaching of literature. I re-examined the transcripts of the audio taped lessons and viewed the video tapes of the activities to seek a better understanding of the students’ perceptions and responses to performance and how certain activities helped shape their responses to literature. Student responses to drama and choral speaking activities, their responses to teacher-fronted and student-centred activities were compared, analysed and duly
categorised. Finally, triangulation was carried out to strengthen the study and to minimise researcher bias (Freeman, 1998).

Conclusion

This chapter details the research site, the key participants and the choice of research design framing the study. Data collection and analysis strategies done to obtain better insights about the study were also explicated in the chapter. I had sought to understand the phenomenon by melding the emic and etic perspectives (Freeman, 1998). I adopted multiple roles including the teacher-researcher stance to explore the use of performance in shaping student responses to literature in an ESL class. The findings will be discussed in the next chapter.