CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study explores the use of performance as a strategy in developing student responses to literature in an ESL class of a secondary girls school. It is driven by four research questions: What are teacher and student perceptions regarding literature, how do in-class performance shape student responses to literature, how do out-of-class performance develop student responses to literature and teacher and student perceptions regarding the utilisation of performance to shape student responses to literature. It is essential to capture students' perceptions and responses to literature as the focus has mainly been on methodology for teachers rather than foregrounding the learners' transactions with texts and their acquisition of literary and linguistic competence through activities like the performance of texts.

This chapter discusses the findings from the data culled over two months of fieldwork with secondary school students as they engaged in various forms of performances involving literature. The first part examines teacher and student perceptions about literature. The next two sections detail the findings on how in-class activities and out-of-class activities help develop student responses to literature. The final part explicates the teacher and student perceptions on the use of performance to shape these adolescent learners' responses to short stories, drama and poetry.

4.1 Perceptions Regarding Literature in the Classroom

As a preliminary to the main discussion, I will discuss the perceptions of the key players namely the teacher and student participants regarding the role of literature as it has a significant impact on how they perceive the use of performance to develop student responses to literature. This section describes their perceptions pertaining to the role of literature in the curriculum and the teaching of literature in the classroom.
The introduction of literature in English as an elective in the secondary school curriculum was perceived as very beneficial by the key teacher and student participants. Their discourse will be discussed at a later part of this chapter. The Literature in English Syllabus, 1990 stipulates the need to enhance language, moral, cultural, humanist and lifelong reading dimensions in students. It also underscores the need to develop learners' abilities to articulate informed responses to texts as well as hone their creative dimensions. The scope of activities in the elective allows and empowers students to make oral and written responses and to articulate these responses through literature-based activities so as to acquire linguistic and literary competence. Students would then be able to forge ahead as carriers of "the literary torch" in their life long journey as competent consumers and producers of texts.

The role of literature has to be played out through the teaching of literature. Its impact is discerned by the views of the teacher and student participants who draw from their literary practices and personal experiences. Literature may be played out in the classroom in two distinct ways namely through teacher-centred pedagogy and learner-centred pedagogy. Both pedagogies entail three main entities: the teacher, the students and the prescribed texts. The findings of the study indicate that learner-centred pedagogy that foregrounds learners' interaction with peers, texts and teacher will enable them to shape and articulate their informed and creative responses to literary texts as well as to engage in literature based activities at the tertiary level or the workplace. This will be further discussed in sections three and four of the chapter.

4.1.1 Teacher Perceptions

In this study, the teacher, a significant player in the classroom, was enthusiastic about the Education Ministry's initiative in introducing the literature in English elective. She
perceived literature as an essential subject in the education of her students for the following reasons:

**Language Development.** The main benefit, according to Sanam, was it motivated the learners to become competent in the target language, English as they explored the authentic use of the language (McRae, 1991). She described her role:

You help them to understand the language patterns, grammar and vocabulary. You [the teacher] must know the text well to teach the students to master the language.

She foregrounds the role of the teacher as the key facilitator of learning. She believes that it is the teacher who is “well versed” in literature who will be able to stimulate a love for literature through her explication of the texts. Hence it was the teacher who could help the students to internalise the linguistic structures adequately. Her certainty about teacher-centred pedagogy seems to marginalize the notion that students will only be able to appreciate and display their understanding of texts if they are allowed to engage with texts and exchange their responses with their peers and teacher (Widdowson, 1975). Her perception that the teacher should perform the role of the primary “knowledge giver” is also grounded on her assumption that “some of the girls are very weak [linguistically] and cannot handle the paper”.

**Moral Development.** The teacher felt that the moral dimension was the primary merit of studying literature. She said:

You get to teach moral values in an enjoyable way. It is easier to influence and mould the characters of the students as they get absorbed in the story.

Her response suggests a personal growth orientation to the role of literature (Bushman & Bushman, 1997). She opined that it allowed the teacher to inculcate moral values in

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learners incidentally within the context of the narrative as they were involved in events in the text.

An Exploration of Life. Sanam discerned the final benefit of literature as an exploration of life. She said,

> we learn more about life through studying the characters and their actions. For example in *The Examination Day*, we see the horrors of an authoritarian government that eliminates the intellectuals of a nation. The girls can understand the plight of the people and appreciate our democratic way of life.

She has highlighted the notion that literature enables the learners to savour the lived-through experiences of others, learn from them and also make informed choices in life. Teacher perceptions of literature in the curriculum, therefore were positive.

4.1.2 Student Perceptions

This section explicates the perceptions of the student participants regarding the study of literature in the ESL class. Initially when I approached the key student participants to elicit their views on literature, they were bewildered and lost for words. As Sri Dewi opined, “we did not know that our comments were important. It took me weeks to convince them that their responses and what they felt and thought about the learning process were important. As we talked, however, a number of observations regarding the value of literature emerged.

Language Development. The study of literature was seen as useful as it helped them acquire competence in the language (Carter & Long, 1991, Bushman & Bushman, 1997). Mei lin responded,

> Literature is an interesting subject. . . reading literature books helps me to write better essays and to use correct grammar in my answers.
Stella, the aspiring lawyer, who had been schooled in literacy practices at home (Heath, 1995) and whose love for books had been nurtured by her parents stated,

I have always had a keen interest in literature. I guess I take up after my father who is deeply interested in literature. My father used to read poems and short stories to us when we were young. . . I think I am good in the subject and it helps me to improve my language and to understand people and issues better.

Christine, whose reading habit was nurtured at home echoed Stella’s sentiments when she remarked, “it is more interesting and [a] better way to improve my English than just doing grammar and vocabulary”. All the students, therefore, were aware that literature would help them to become competent users of the language.

In addition, literature was useful in inculcating the reading habit. Sri Dewi, the avid reader of literary tomes asserted,

I enjoy reading books in English. . . literature allows me to read a variety of stories, plays and poems.

Sri Dewi’s flair for the language combined with her inherent interest in literature (Probst, 1984, cited in Bushman & Bushman, 1997) augmented her deep love for reading. Language development therefore, would extend beyond the spaces of classroom and school through sustained engagement with literature.

*Cultural Awareness.* Mei Lin underscored the importance of the cultural dimension (Bushman & Bushman, 1997) embedded in literary texts when she stated,

reading literature books exposes me to various cultures. . . one gets to understand Indian culture and religion by reading *The Return*. I also got to understand the culture in universities in *Educating Rita*. I can compare the different cultures and understand others better.
The participant, a Malaysian Chinese was able to understand Indian culture by reading a literary text that would otherwise have probably remained alien to her. I noticed that she had alluded to a text which was a prescribed text for STPM candidates as well as for the literature component in English for certain states.

**Development of Thinking Skills.** Stella asserted that literature allowed her to explore ideas through the use of cognition. She said,

> Literature makes us think hard as we discuss the characters... their actions and important issues on life found in the books. I have learnt to think deeply [reflect] about issues... and not to make decisions rashly. For instance, when I read the play, *Macbeth*, I knew about the danger of being too ambitious. I used to think that being ambitious was a good quality. It [literature] has helped me to analyse and be critical of stuff [issues].

Stella was aware that life was complex as reflected in literature. The issue of 'ambition' was problematised through the play as it had both the potential for good and evil. *Macbeth* helped her explore the making of informed ethical and moral decisions through reflection on the text.

**Development of Moral Values.** All four key participants cited the moral dimension as a significant benefit of studying literature. Sri Dewi opined,

> Moral values are not taught directly like in Moral Education, they [moral values] are found in the stories. You will be able to read about various situations [experiences] in life. If you are wealthy, you will be able to experience in your mind how the poor or sick live and you will become more sympathetic and understanding.

> Literature allowed this learner to empathise with others and to develop understanding and compassion for others. She too felt that literature was different from moral education as
“for Moral Education, we just memorise all the 16 values and (sighs) the other [auxiliary values. The moral values in literature are different cos [because] we learn the values by analysing the behaviour and words of the characters”.

Stella also said that literature enabled her “to learn about life, important issues in life and about the happenings in the society”. She added,

when we read The Children, it made an impact on me cos [because] normally, stories on war show the soldiers and other adults suffering and dying, but in this poem it explains the suffering of innocent children, many die. The poet repeats the line “the blood of children” to emphasize the [senseless] killing of innocent children. It makes me thankful that I live in a peaceful country.

Literature has allowed Stella to ascertain and ponder over the exemplary and sordid facets of people’s behaviour and the world. It has also enabled her to appreciate what she has. Mei Lin also concurred with Stella’s views when she stated that “after reading The Lamp in which you see a poor mother abuse her children physically and emotionally to release tension, it helps me to understand and appreciate my family as they really love and care for me.”

These adolescents were at a stage of seeking their own identities and making decisions on right and wrong (Bushman & Bushman, 1997). As they grappled with conflicts and forging of relationships, literature allowed them to make informed decisions about life.

Developing Multiple Perspectives. Sri Dewi pointed out that the study of literature was invaluable as literary texts give you a view of life from different perspectives. She said,

For example, the story, The Man From Kabul is told from the perspective of Mini’s father, a main character in the story. . . . Stories like The Lamp, the authors tell you everything from different perspectives.
The learner was aware that the different points of view that authors chose presented different perspectives on issues of life.

In talking about literature, the teacher participant and the student participants described the benefits of studying literature. The teacher perceived literature as a vehicle to impart moral values and influence the holistic development of learners. She also believed that literature would enable her students to improve their language proficiency. She felt that they would learn about important issues and experiences in life that would help shape their personalities. She believed that the students would benefit mainly through her explication and interpretation of texts. However, scholarship in the field (Rosenblatt, 1978, Skrebels, cited in Bushman & Bushman, 1997) presents a different scenario as it suggests that students need to engage in meaning making actively and that each reading of a text proffers different interpretations for different readers.

The student participants were able to state and elaborate on what they felt were the advantages of studying literature. They concurred with the teacher that it would help them to improve their command of the language. They also maintained that it allowed them to imbibe moral values as issues demanding an ethical stance are depicted in the context of life through characters. They also noted that literature allowed them to satiate their love for reading which is crucial as most telesaturated students (Maher, cited in Bushman & Bushman, 1997) rarely read books. They also noted that literature allowed them to explore and reflect on ideas, think through conflicts and relationships which would help them make informed decisions about life.

A strand of dissonance in the perceptions of the teacher and students relates to the cultural dimension. The teacher did not explore this dimension in her lessons. One of the objectives of the literature syllabus is to enable students to read and understand the cultures of
people of different parts of the world (*Literature in English Syllabus*, 1990). One student participant had asserted that literature had offered her a window into the cultures, religions and lifestyles of different people. The cultural dimension would enable them to celebrate cultural diversity and move beyond the stereotyping and negative perceptions of various ethnic groups. It is therefore evident that the key participants perceive the study of literature as a beneficial subject that nurtures and develops their intellectual, cultural, moral and affective dimensions.

4.2 The Teaching of Literature in the Classroom

As previously mentioned, literature lessons in Form Four H comprised the teacher’s explication of elements of texts, dictation of notes, occasional posing of questions to students and round robin reading of text by teacher and students. The pedagogical orientation adopted by her in her class indicated a primarily teacher-centred pedagogy with occasional learner-centred lessons. This section explores “the triad of relationships involving the teacher, texts and readers [students]” (Corcoran & Evans, 1987, p. 7) which would shed light on the teaching and learning of literature in Sanam’ class.

4.2.1 Teacher-Centred Pedagogy

As stated previously, in the relationship between teacher, text and students, the teacher was the dominant figure in the encounters with literature.

*The Teacher.* The classroom practitioner exuded confidence in teaching literature which was attributed to the fact that she had obtained a degree in TESL and had taken courses on literature during her undergraduate days. She was the sole ESL teacher teaching literature in her school. Her assurance which was grounded in her professional qualifications was enhanced by her conviction that “literature is my passion”. This passion resulted in her being “carried away” when she taught literature. She enthused,
sometimes, I enjoy the texts so much that I can go on talking and talking about them. Then I wonder if my students get the message. For example, when I explained the text *The Daffodils* to the students, a student commented “teacher after all it is a flower, it is not even a rose!”

This anecdote indicated that she was comfortable in the role of controller, in complete charge over how the lesson played out in her class (Harmer, 1990). The students had not however shared the teacher’s enthusiasm for her favourite text. They had probably been captivated by the explanation of the text by the teacher but were unable to interact with the text and formulate their own responses to the text (Reyes, 1987). It also suggests that such teacher-dominant lessons would perpetuate the students’ complete dependence on the teacher to provide interpretations of texts rather than grapple with texts individually or collaboratively to make sense of texts and to savour the literary and aesthetic experiences nested in the tomes (Rosenblatt, 1970).

Sanam’s belief that “the students must enjoy the texts and I must instil a love for literature and my students know about my love for literature and that I can go on and on” reflect her teacher-centred stance and her assumption that her detailed and zealous explication of texts would translate into her charges being motivated and interested in studying literary texts. This shows that she perceived her role as primarily a deliverer of content (Subramaniam, 2002) and role model and bearer of the merits of studying literature rather than a facilitator of learning who could help them develop their responses to literary texts. Scholarship (Hoetker, 2000) however, indicates that if students are not scaffolded in their appreciation of texts, the impact of even the best instruction will be short lived. The teacher too, would not be able to effectively gauge the learning that has taken place in her class.
The Texts. In the teacher-centred pedagogy, the prescribed texts were tools that she utilised to explicate their contents. Sanam would either read parts of the texts or instruct her students to read the texts. The reading would be followed by her dictation of notes or explanation of the elements and difficult terms. The focus was on identifying and locating meaning in texts. The texts remained mysterious and difficult entities and meanings encoded by writers could only be decoded by the expert—the teacher (Corcoran, 1987). Apart from the occasional oral responses to texts, the students seldom articulated their personal (reader) responses to texts. They were not participants in meaning making from texts. Scholarship also indicates that learning becomes meaningful if they are allowed to explore texts on their own and participate in activities that cater to their needs and interests (Rosenblatt, 1970, McRae, 1991, Candlin, 1996). The teacher’s stance reveals that she perceived her role as the main mediator and transmitter of meaning nested in texts.

The Students. The above mentioned pedagogy has a significant impact on the learners. They had been relegated to the roles of passive listeners, note-takers and occasional readers. The students expressed boredom with their recipient roles. Sri Dewi opined,

Classes are no fun. . . all we do is listen to the teacher talk and then take down notes [that] she dictates . . . then we are asked to memorise the notes for the exam.

Stella reiterated Sri Dewi’s views and observed,

She reads and then tells us the important things in the texts. There is no interaction between her and us as she does most of the talking. We do not discuss the stories ourselves. It is so . . . boring.

Their responses indicated that they were dissatisfied with their teacher-centred lessons and wanted the space and freedom to be active participants in the lessons.

I also observed that the times when she posed questions to her learners, their responses
would be foreshortened as she hurried on with her confident reading of the text or provided the responses herself (Corcoran, 1987). She did not capitalise on "wait time" to discern if their responses were relevant or valid. I also noticed that she seldom varied her tone of voice while teaching. Christine confided that "she does not have any facial expressions" when she transmits textual knowledge to her students. This also underscores the notion that students would be motivated by enthusiastic teachers whose display of enthusiasm overtly through facial expressions, tone of voice may be transferred to the students.

Although Sanam tried to pass her love for literature to her learners, the student responses and classroom observation indicate that teacher-driven pedagogy though is beneficial in getting students acquainted with texts would probably promote rote learning and dependence on teachers to interpret literary texts. This pedagogy which does not foreground students’ responses and their learning also does not address ways to foster fruitful involvement between students and literary works (Johanesson, cited in Salomone & Davis, 1997).

4.2.2 Learner-Centred Pedagogy

Teacher-centred pedagogy which focuses on the teacher playing the central role in the classroom does not address learners’ needs and interests. Effective teaching can only take place if the students desire to learn. On one hand, learner-driven pedagogy which foregrounds learners’ interactions with their peers, texts and teachers ensures students’ active participation in lessons.

The Teacher. The classroom practitioner commented that student-centred activities like dramatisation and group discussions were vital to shape student responses to literature. She responded,

they make lessons more interesting, otherwise it is just chalk and talk. It is just like a
lecture and taking down of notes.

Sanam’s response showed her awareness that teacher-dominant lessons resulted in a one-way flow of information. Student-centred lessons too would stimulate and sustain their interest in the lessons. The teacher’s comment also indicated that she could probably vary her teaching techniques and her roles to help her students respond better to literature. She was not resistant to change as she was willing to carry out student-centred strategies like performance to develop her students’ responses to the prescribed literary texts.

I noticed that when the students were engaged in performance-based activities, she seemed rather uncertain about her role as a facilitator of learning. She would walk around the class, to ensure that all the students participated in the activities. She would act as a resource person by providing answers to student queries. Sanam would at other times be seated at her desk and would be writing out her lesson plans. She would chide her girls when the noise levels rose as the excited learners got carried away with their activities. The students would usually form groups with their friends and she did not persuade them to form other groups.

As the facilitator, she would elicit oral feedback from the students and round up lessons by writing out questions based on the texts discussed for students as homework or remind the students to read the texts for the following lessons. The teacher’s stance and responses indicated that she was not averse to student-centred activities to help nurture their responses to texts. Despite her uncertainty about the dramatic shift in her roles, she attempted to play the roles of facilitator, resource person and coach allowing her students to take centre stage in her classes during the duration of the study.

**The Texts.** All four student participants who were avid readers and competent users of the language were actively involved in a “dynamic reading transaction with texts” (Rosenblatt, 1970, p. 80) in their reading. During performance-based activities, they were actively engaged
in taking the texts apart and putting them back together with their peers. They shared their responses with their groups and also took part in individual presentations.

The participants also revealed that they adopted a similar strategy to negotiate meaning and to personalise their encounters with literary texts which can be daunting because of the linguistic input and the writers’ craft. The students assumed the role of observers in texts (Wilhelm, 1997, Corcoran & Evans, 1987). Christine said,

I visualise all the characters, scenes... the buildings. If it[text] describes a mansion, I will try to visualise it by reading the description just like I am in front of it.

Stella stated that “it is like watching a movie in your head” and Sri Dewi opined that she would also “read and reread certain parts so as not to miss out important things in the story”. Their comments denote that their learners had adopted the sophisticated techniques of picturing and imaging (Wilhelm, 1997) to understand and appreciate the texts without relying on the teacher to interpret the texts for them. The observer role had allowed them to be intellectually and emotionally involved in making sense of the texts. They had also adopted the role of co-creators (Corcoran & Evans, 1987) when they wrote the scripts for the dramatisation activity in which they had adhered to the original script. The students also engaged in recreating texts which required close reading and understanding the writer’s stance when they transformed the short story, The Lamp into a play for performance in class.

The students’ comments and active interaction with texts indicated that they were interested and enjoyed working with the texts. They looked forward to constructing meaning by drawing on their reader roles, personal experiences and worldviews (Subramaniam, 2002).  

The Students. The student participants expressed a strong preference for learner-centred activities in the literature class. Stella echoed the sentiments of her counterparts when she asserted,
It is important for the teacher to give notes and [to] analyse the text, but . . . not all the time. Discussions, solo presentations are important so that we are involved in the lessons. Discussions are important as you get to read the texts, exchange ideas and views about stories with your group and it will help you to talk and write about the stories [texts] confidently.

Her response revealed that the learners did not reject the teacher’s role in helping them access the texts. They however, did not want to be spoon-fed all the time. They expressed their desire to be involved “hands on” in the learning experiences, to articulate and share their responses with their peers. It also showed that students would not be daunted when they engaged in communicating their responses to their peers. The student-centred activities listed by Stella also indicate that these activities give them a sense of autonomy which is not possible in teacher-fronted lessons (Harmer, 1991).

The students were also highly excited and motivated during learner-centred lessons. The participants as well as the weak, timid and competent students were not passive recipients of learning but played the roles of monitors, respondents and informed sources based on their abilities and language proficiency (Kohn, 1975, cited in Gaias, 1978). As Stella noted, these activities served as confidence boosters to the students in shaping their responses to literary texts.

Conclusion

In sum, students’ responses to literature can be articulated essentially through student-centred pedagogy. As the focus would be on the real learning that takes place in class rather than the teaching of content that is transmitted to students. These student responses to literature can take multiple forms in-and out-of-the literature classroom. One such response is
through the performance of literary texts. The following section will describe the findings on activities that helped shape student responses to literature.

4.3 Developing Student Responses through In-Class Performance

This section explores the definition of performance, its use as a learning and teaching strategy, the multiple roles students played in exploring performance in class as well as developing student responses through the dramatisation of a play and a short story.

4.3.1 What is Performance?

Performance in the study involved bringing alive literary texts where the performer draws from various resources. In performance, the performer may draw on personal "resources" such as the voice, facial expression, action and movement. Additional resources which may be utilised could include make-up, costumes, music, sound effects, props, sets and lighting. The nature of performance may be shaped by the situation in which it occurs. Performances in class are less formal and the resources available are generally limited. A stage performance is more formal with a larger audience and draws upon multiple resources available in theatre. Through performance, the performer's responses are discerned as they interpret and recreate the contents of the page. In performance, the audience responds by comparing their own interpretation of the text with the performer's interpretation.

4.3.2 Performance as a Teaching and Learning Strategy

Scholarship (Woods, 2001, Lucas, 2002) indicates that performance is a powerful pedagogical strategy that can be explored by learners of varying levels of linguistic proficiency and ability. Most literary works, plays in particular are written to be performed. One main reason for utilising performance as a teaching tool is to help learners discover the complexities of life and to perceive ways of working out social conflicts, moral predicaments
and personal problems (Burton, 1967). It would facilitate the shaping of student responses to literature through generating greater insights, reflection, empathy and tolerance.

Performance is a potent strategy that can be used in-class and out-of-class so that students articulate their responses to texts when they are given free rein to explore and interpret the texts within the dramatic context independently and collaboratively. It would sensitize students to the multiple possibilities of the dramatic effect as they work at the transition from page to stage and back to the page. The learning outcomes stated in the Literature in English Syllabus, 1990 underscores the need for students to be able to display their understanding and appreciation of literature through performance.

In the study, the performance of texts from the genres of short story, poetry and drama took the form of dramatization, recitation, mime and choral speaking (see Appendix A). Texts used were sometimes adapted or scripted before being performed. Literature therefore was experienced through the processes of reading, discussion, performance, and writing facilitating the exploration of literary elements.

This chapter also discusses the four significant roles of students involved in performance. It explicates the types of performance, literary genres explored and the elements foreground. It also examines students’ attempts at scripting texts or adapting the texts. A discussion of the literary texts performed by the students of Form Four H over the course of their literature lessons will also be included.

4.3.3 Student Roles in Class Performances

The student responses to literature were multi-pronged and they played multiple roles in activities relating to performance in class. These roles included that of script writers, performers, production crew and audience. These plural roles were vital in managing the processes involved in recreating the texts.
*Script writers.* The learners engaged in scripting texts dabbled with genre transformation as they composed the play script for the story *The Lamp.* Script writing entailed engaging actively with text in meaning making and explored ways to make text come alive in class. The other script writing activity focused on adapting the script. The script for the play *Educating Rita* was a reinvention of Russell’s text with minor adaptations relating to Rita’s working class language. They retained the authentic text in poetry. The role was an important one as a clear and cohesive script enabled the performers to give voice and life to the performance.

*Performers.* The performers also played a key role as meaning makers of text. Their role was pivotal in transforming the text into a rich visual experience. They were adept at utilising resources such as voice, action, facial expressions and sound effects to enliven the performance. They empathised with the characters and showed a sound appreciation of the text. The creative spirit in the performers enabled them to transfer their ideas and insights into a performance (Lucas, 2002). The ability to act is important (Toye & Prendiville, 2002) as performing requires the students to think from different vantage points rather than just being themselves. The performers worked closely with the script writers and the production crew for a smooth transition from page to stage.

*Supporting Crew.* The production crew or “image makers” (Barranger, 1995) played a significant supporting role. They were in charge of injecting visual and aural elements to the script which enhanced the performance of the actors. During in-class performances, the crew had to improvise as resources in class were limited.

*Audience.* The audience responded to the performance by assessing the overall impact it had on them. They proffered useful feedback on performance as well as a different perspective to the performed text. Since they had experienced the performance intensely in their minds
(Griffin, cited in Salomone & Davis, 1997) they compared their interpretation with that of the actors' interpretation and provided an informed response both orally and in written form.

The multiple roles played by the students during in class performance saw the students actively involved in interacting, interpreting the texts and collaborating with their peers to enact their performances in class.

4.3.4 Developing Student Responses Through Dramatisation.

For in-class performance, various types of performances were used. They included dramatisation, recitation and mime. The literary genres explored in class were drama, short story and poetry. The short story text was (The Lamp), drama text (Educating Rita) and the poem (Children's Song).

The next section will focus on the findings and discussion in relation to the teaching and learning that was played out in class. Performance was organised by way of the literary texts that were performed by the Form Four H students over the duration of their literature lessons. Student responses were focused on performing a play, a short story and a poem.

Performing a Play. In teaching Educating Rita, dramatisation was used as a strategy to develop student responses to the play. To prepare students for performance, the teacher discussed the age and profile of university students. Her students had already read the play at home and in class they discussed whether the protagonist conformed or differed from the usual undergraduate profile.

The subsequent stages in generating student responses to text included scripting the adapted text, preparing for performance, the actual performance and written responses to the performed text.
The outcomes of the lessons will be detailed in this section.

In the next activity, groups were allotted 15 minutes to identify the character traits of Frank and Rita. As they read the text, they were embarrassed by the working class words used by Rita and giggled and whispered to each other. Amutha seemed uneasy with lines. However, they were quite clear about the format of the play text. Mei Lin remarked that "drama has a lot of dialogue, but not the others" [genres].

The dynamics of group work was set in motion when they wrote the script. They were focused and some, like Rathi, peered over the shoulders of her peers and more information about the characters. Hafiza checked her responses with Anita. The discussion became more animated and noise levels rose as they completed their dialogues and prepared for the performance. Research (McCarthy cited in Carter and Mc Rae, 1996) shows that creating dialogue and performing the text enable students to engage in post reading analysis of texts in a stress free manner.

The students then negotiated their roles for the performance and rehearsed their lines. After 15 minutes of preparation, Stella's group volunteered to perform first. She enacted the role of Rita while Mei Lin adopted a gruff manly tone to play Frank's role. Their performance was greeted with applause by their classmates. The production crew had frantically done their part by rearranging the furniture in front of the class and even placing a calendar on the wall to represent the portrait in Frank's room. Collaboratively the students had worked together to bring the tale of the dissolute lecturer and the eager student to life.

As a post performance activity, individual student responses to character were elicited by the teacher. Stella's response was:
when I took part in the play....it was fun and interesting....it helped me to understand
the play better as I could see the characters. The fact that my mother is a hair-stylist
who got her diploma.....after marriage made me [want to] act the part. I got to
understand her work and her desire to better herself, just like Rita.

The student's response indicated that acting out the script enabled her to make meaningful
personal connections with the text.

The performance of the text generated plural outcomes. The outcomes include
stimulating interest in the text, developing comprehension, exploring interpretations of the
play as well as developing empathy with characters.

The key student participants affirmed that the play was initially "incredibly yawn
inducing". The performance however had made them change their responses to the play. Sri
Dewi stated that she was able to respond positively to the play as she had initially been put off
by the language.

The text was also made concrete through performance as Sri Dewi commented. "It
had also facilitated a better understanding of the text. She opined that dramatization had
enabled her to flesh out the characters who had earlier remained mere descriptions on the
page.

Performance had also facilitated in students a cogent interpretation of text aided by
interactions with their peers. Sri Dewi stated "We were able to air our views and go over the
issues together and come up with the script and the performance". Her response underscores
Vygotsky's social learning theory that maintained that students could develop their learning
potential through meaningful interaction with "more capable others". Research also reveals that students will be able to develop richer and deeper responses to text if they are allowed to exchange opinions, and engage in discussion about texts with their peers. (Almas, 1995, Eeds & Wells, 1989).

Another positive outcome of the play was, it triggered an affective response in learners. Sri Dewi said, "I saw Rita as a person who wanted to study badly even though she was only a hair dresser". The performance had enabled her to show compassion for a marginalized individual. Her response also supports one of the aims of the Literature Syllabus which is "to develop in students a deeper level of understanding and an awareness and sensitivity to human values and issues". (Literature in English Syllabus, 1990, p.1). In addition, performance had nurtured empathy for others in the learners. One student asserted "we learned a lot about her and ourselves especially the importance of education for women". Mei Lin empathized with Frank as "I got to imagine myself in his shoes".

**Performance of the Short Story.** In exploring the short story, the teacher used Kino's plight in *The Pearl* which the students were familiar with to forge an intertextual connection with *The Lamp* which was also a story about the struggles of poverty. Then having triggered their thoughts about the theme, the next stage involved scripting in groups. The three student groups were assigned three key episodes in the story to explore the plot. The scenes would also allow them to ponder over the elements of character, theme and symbolism. Dramatization followed the scripting.

Group 1 explored the scene in Salim's classroom, group 2 focused on the scene in the principal's office and the third group worked with the fire episode. Again, the students were
excited and motivated as they transformed the story into a play script. They competed with each other to complete their scripts and perform for their peers. Despite the elevated noise levels, they were deeply engaged in their discussion about the text. Noise in a collaborative classroom shows that active learning is taking place (Tinzmann et al. 1990).

The students enjoyed themselves as they discussed their various parts in the play. Swee Lee who was assigned the role of Salim's mother was saddened by the fact that the character was always tired, malnourished and over-worked. In improvising sets and props the production crew of one group utilized a student's water bottle to represent the lamp. They also decided to perform at the back of the class by shifting the furniture and creating more space for the actors to move around during their presentation.

The students threw themselves whole heartedly into their performance. The first group brought alive the characters of the timid, diligent Salim and the strict but kind hearted teacher. Vicknesh's portrayal of Salim tugged at the hearts of her classmates. Christine who also played the part of Salim used her acting skills to good use when she rolled on the floor, writhing in pain after being singed by the fire. Swee Nee too portrayed the angry exhausted mother well as she lashed out at her "son" for causing the fire. Jin Lei and Su Lin who played the roles of Salim's siblings went overboard with their childish howls and were asked to stop by their classmates. The performance of the short story generated enthusiasm among the learners as they collaborated to experience the aesthetic and dramatic elements of the text as well as blurred the divide between real life and the textual world effectively.
As a post performance activity, the students were asked to provide oral feedback on their responses. They pointed out the lack of facial expressions in some of their friends and overacting in others. They stated that they looked forward to more performances in class. The students were also asked to write their responses to plot, theme, character and symbolism. In exploring symbolism, Christine said,

The lamp though it was a water bottle symbolized education that would have brightened Salim's future. I felt sorry for the boy. The lamp also symbolized joy and warmth, things that Salim would never experience. For instance, we urbanities take light [electricity] for granted and in the story, Salim's family does not even have it [a lamp].

The students were also able to identify the themes of poverty and the importance of education after being involved in the performance. Stella noted that "the family lacked the basic necessities because of poverty. It is probably the reason for Salim's mother's constant anger and displeasure at [with] Salim". Christine responded about the value of education with "Salim's awareness of the importance of education makes him go to desperate measures just to ensure his homework is done, a reason he makes the lamp". She also said she was able to flesh out Salim's character well after discussing, acting and observing her classmates' performance. She wrote, "Salim is 12 years old...has two younger brothers. Salim is terrified of [his] angry mother. He is determined to study.....invents lamps.....shows he is a creative, bright boy". She was able to vividly describe Salim's mother as " a typical village woman...[she is] drained of all energy...probably looks old and has a haggard face..." The
same student was also able to show understanding of the plot. She had identified and elaborated on the sequence of events correctly and had included the episode about Salim's physical and emotional abuse by his mother. (See Appendix B) A significant outcome was the transformation of passive, listless students into a class of animated and motivated learners. The entire class was involved in reading, building on their responses and presenting their interpretation of the text. They were interested and enjoyed bringing alive the sad plight of a poverty-stricken family and their bleak future. Another outcome was their affective response. Christine had stated earlier that she "felt very sorry for Salim." The performance had evoked her sympathy for the poor, bright child who was deprived of basic necessities that she had always taken for granted. Similarly, the students also showed empathy for the characters. Mun Lee, who hardly reads literary works remarked, "there was a blackout in my area last night and I was able to experience the mood of the story and also feel exactly what Salim experiences in the story". She had also been sensitized to the element of mood, which had heightened her appreciation of the text. The students had made the link between personal experience and appreciation of the text something that would have probably remained unexplored in the usual teacher-centered literature lessons. Her response indicates that students can articulate views about texts in personal ways and it helped them develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of texts read (Eeds & Wells, 1989, cited in Bond, 2001).

The oral and written responses indicated that performance that facilitated the whole class participation in making meaning from text and displaying their collective sense making through performance has empowered the students. It had also nurtured their appreciation and understanding of literary works.
*Performing a Poem.* The Form Four H students also explored the genre of poetry through mime and recitation. The poem discussed was Thomas 'Children's Song'. As an effective point of entry into the text, the students were asked to think of the similarities in the text with the movie *Home Alone*. Both texts focused on the disparities between the children's world and that of the adults. As stated earlier the literary element foregrounded in the lesson were theme and literary devices.

The students who got into groups were asked to "think of creative ways of dramatizing the poem" so as to spotlight the theme and devices used to enhance poem. The students were soon engaged in a lively discussion of the literary elements and themes. Sanam carried out a teacher-led whole class discussion of the literal and figurative meaning in an earlier lesson. The students reread and actively grappled with a line-by-line analysis of the poem. They also worked at the poetic devices embedded in the text and discussed how they augmented the themes. They were intrigued by the elements of Nature that were featured in the poem.

In the third state of the discussion, to prepare for performance they assigned roles to group members. The group dynamics varied slightly as they appointed secretaries to draft the scripts based on the contributions of the group. They also negotiated the actions, facial expressions, gestures of the performers and the manner of recitation of the seventeen line poem. Analysis of a sample script of the students depicted their grasp of the themes, Sri Dewi wrote:

- Adults are not welcomed into [in] the children's world. This is one main theme. Thomas writes [the poem] through the eyes of a child...........the child is telling adults that they have their own world away from the peering [inquisitive] and prying adults.
- The other theme is the difference of [in] viewpoint of heaven of a child and [that] of
adults. Adults view heaven...a place soul[s] go after death, children....... experience paradise on earth, full of secrets and activities.

It indicated understanding derived from close reading of the text. Sri Dewi also identified two distinct literary device used by the poet: metaphors such as "under the closed flower", smooth shell" as very interesting and colorful; and personification in the line "that mocked the faded blue". She defined personification as the "act of putting human traits into [to] a non living thing". Although the learner had not elaborated on the devices of repetition and detachment, her sensitivity to metaphor and personification suggested a growing literary competence.

The next stage of shaping student response to text was through their performance of the poem. The opted to recite the poem and to present a mime. Each group had one student reciting the poem complete with gesture, modulation of voice and facial expressions to display the rich poetic language of text. The other members of group dramatized the scene as the reader recited the poem. The group of weak students who performed the mime also brought the text alive as they used non verbal devices of gestures, actions, facial expressions to spotlight the themes of the text. All three groups enacted scenes of children at play desperately trying to keep their secret games and activities away from the gaze of nosy adults.

As a post performance activity, the students were asked to attempt a written discussion of the themes and literary devices as well as their views on the dramatization of the poem. Their responses ranged from a few lines to a couple of paragraphs (See Appendix C)

The students oral and written feedback revealed that dramatization was a beneficial activity that had helped shape their meaningful responses to texts. The notion of visualization of text (Wilhem, 1989) was underscored by a key participant who stated that performance
"enabled me to visualize the poem better and the themes became clearer". The notion of immediacy as the performers speak, act and behave like the characters help students to experience the text in a concrete sense (Barranger, 1995).

Sri Dewi noted that dramatization of the poem was a "memorable learning experience". Poems were not "difficult and boring" any more as they were fully involved in the sense making and performance of the text. The difficulty posed by poetry was greatly alleviated by the collaborative nature of performance. Their discussion prior to performance had heightened their engagement with texts and their appreciation of poems.

The students also showed initiative and interest in taking responsibility for their own learning through performance. They were able to grapple with texts, respond to the text with help from their more competent peers and also contribute their responses in group discourse. They showed confidence in reading and responding to literary works of different genres.

The notion of learner autonomy was evident as they took their respective roles seriously and diligently explored the literary elements with their classmates without depending on the teacher to analyse the text. They also seemed comfortable with the notion of peer teaching as the weaker learners were scaffolded by their more capable peers. They explored ways of meaning making of text and performing the text to express their understanding and interpretation of texts through performance together. The analysis of literary works was not forced upon them but became an exciting journey of exploration of literary elements and genres through performance.

The subsequent section will look at how performance was utilized to enable students to articulate their responses to the genres of drama and poetry.
4.4 Developing Student Responses in Out-of-Class Performance

Rahman, the Kabuliwallah spread his wares on the floor and beckoned the shy Mini who hid behind her father. Rahman coaxed her softly and offered her a packet of raisins. She accepted his gift and slowly warmed up to the stranger who then talked to the child as if she were his equal. The friendship that developed between the Afghan street peddler and the young daughter of an upper middle class family in Calcutta which transcended social, and cultural barriers came alive in the school hall before a rapt audience who were moved to tears by the poignant tale.

(Fieldnotes, 9th July, 2002)

The excerpt is a description of the production of a month long pain-staking labour of love by the students who performed the play based on the short story, The Man From Kabul over the period of the study. The two out-of-class performance-based activities by Form Four H students were dramatisation of a short story (The Man From Kabul) and choral speaking of a poem (Greed). These performances complemented in-class processes to shape student responses to literature. This section explicates the findings in relation to out-of-class performances. It discusses the students’ roles in moving through the processes of sense making and staging a play and a choral recitation.

The scripting of the short story for dramatisation was done by the teacher and the researcher thus transforming the genre of the short story into a play text. This allowed students to savour the fusion of narration melded with dramatic moments. Scripting was done by the teachers because the district-level competition was imminent and the students were caught up in several other school-based activities. However, student input was allowed. The literary elements underscored in the play were character, theme and language. (See Appendix F)
The choral speaking text was a poem that fused the elements of a ballad and drama through vivid yet simple language to capture the attention of students who had a phobia for poetry as well as to reach a wider audience of students at the district level competition. The elements foregrounded in the poem were character, theme, setting and literary devices. The adapted script enabled students to experience the poem through language, sound effects, gestures, facial expressions, movement and voice modulation (See Appendix G).

4.4.1 Student Roles in Performances Out-of-Class

The Form Four H students collaborated with the English Language Society to stage the out-of-class performances. They adopted roles such as script writers, actors, director, team leader, production crew and audience to brainstorm and shape their collective interpretation and understanding of the texts for performance. Performance out-of-class allowed students to enhance their presentations by drawing upon theatre resources. These visual and audio resources included lighting, make-up, costumes, props, sets, music and sound effects.

Script Writers. The students played an auxiliary role as the text was scripted by the teacher and researcher. However, students like Sri Dewi served as “sounding boards” as ideas about the script were discussed. Christine suggested weaving in an additional role of the tutor for Mini. She felt that the role would highlight the child’s innocence and talkative nature. Besides, they suggested roles for Rahman’s family be included to allow more student participation as well as to emphasise the story’s theme of strong family ties.

Text adaptation of the poem for choral speaking was undertaken zealously by the students as they wanted a text that would ensure victory at the district-level competition. They decided on the division of lines for the three different groups with low, medium and high voices. They
selected the students who would recite the solo lines and discussed the sounds effects that would heighten suspense, and inject interest and variety to the performance.

**The Actors.** The actors were selected based on active negotiations between teacher and students. The performers grappled with the challenging task of portraying the feelings, actions, behaviour of the characters they played. They drew on sensory responses, memory, intellect and imagination and talent to breathe life into characters from a different world. Christine was able to use her personal experiences and observations to sustain audience’s interest in the performance. Nisha used voice and facial expressions to dramatically allow audience to empathise with the generous and compassionate Rahman.

The students attended rehearsals after school to help them “get into character” and to coordinate their acting. They also discussed appropriate ways of saying their lines with the director and the audience and constantly strove to ensure their words and actions complemented each other. The director allowed them 10 days to memorise the script. Then, a final audition was held and a cast of 15 was selected to perform the play. The cast and director continued discussions on interpretation of text and ways of recreating the short story effectively. The interactive discourse enables students to talk with purpose on issues related to text (Toye & Prendiville, 2000).

The performers in choral speaking focussed on group recitation of the poem. They worked diligently at synchronising their voices, the nuances of the language, facial expressions, movements and articulating apt sounds. They grappled with the notion of dramatic voice to underscore the literary elements nested in the text. They followed the cues of their leader to ensure a smooth delivery of the performance. The rigorous rehearsals saw tempers flare as some students failed to follow the leader’s hand signals or when others
fluffed their lines. However, with daily practice sessions, the performers succeeded in synchronising voice, words, action, movements and facial expressions. The students were fully aware that one student's failure to focus on delivery would spell disaster for the whole team. The students would be heard reciting the line “One for all and all for one” to provide moral support for the team. They also devised a cheer session and each rehearsal would end with the lusty cheer.

**Production Crew.** The production crew for the play was in-charge of lighting, music, costumes, props, make up. They discussed their responsibilities and shared out the workload. The lighting crew and the music crew conferred with the director about the visual and audio effects that would enhance the performance. They spent days on stage experimenting with the lights, types of music and sound effects. The audio team decided to play sitar music to create the mood of the play. The efforts of the crew cannot be underestimated as 99.9% of the audience is not aware of lighting but 100% are affected by it (Barranger, 1995). The props crew had the task of converting the empty stage into the world of the characters. They discussed the appropriate props with the director and procured an old typewriter, mats, vases, floral decoration and oil lamps. The costumes crew had to source for Indian garments and accessories as the play was set in Calcutta and all the characters were Hindus with the exception of Rahman’s family who were Muslims. They even managed to obtain a red wedding lengha for Mini the bride, kurtas, salwar kameez and saris for the characters. They helped the characters wear the costumes as well. They adhered closely to the script to ensure the costumes were appropriate and reflected the characters. Costumes are important as they add colour, style and meaning to the play’s environment (Barranger, 1995). The make-up crew assembled a kit of powder, lipstick, rouge and other materials. They had strips of cotton dyed in black to serve as a beard for Rahman and a moustache for the writer. They were
aware that make-up if applied wrongly could destroy the actors’ characterisation or subject the cast to the ridicule of the audience.

The production crew for the choral speaking team fetched the benches from the canteen, arranged them in three rows and replaced the benches after each performance.

**Audience.** The audience of the play had in-depth knowledge of the text as they had discussed it in class. They were able to offer meaningful feedback to the actors as they were able to compare their interpretations of the text with the actors’ interpretations. They were critical when the actors appeared stiff, forgot their lines or lapsed into giggles. They also offered suggestions to improve the performance.

Similarly the audience for the choral speaking team offered suggestions to rectify weaknesses in performance. The team had been crestfallen during the early stages as the senior team had labelled them “expressionless losers”. However, they responded positively to feedback from the audience and worked collaboratively to improve their performance.

**Director/Team Leader.** The director of the play, a dynamic actress decided to wear the director’s hat for the play. Sri Dewi performed multiple roles including directing the actors, worked with the production crew and offering feedback to script writers. She displayed charisma, efficient management and leadership qualities in marshalling the cast and crew together motivating them to give their best to stage a good performance. She played a key role in transforming the text to a visual and aesthetic experience for the audience as the heart-warming tale of Mini and the Kabuliwallah unfolded before them.

The leader of the choral speaking team developed confidence and management skills by reviewing taped performances of the previous school teams. Hilyah also consulted senior team members for ways to motivate her team to bring alive the haunting tale of greed, revenge
and retribution. Her role was an important one as an error in giving the correct signals and directions would affect the performance. She worked patiently and diligently to spur her teammates to blend their voices and to give life to the performance.

4.4.2 Developing Student Responses through Dramatisation

This section explores how student responses were developed through dramatisation and choral speaking.

**Performing a Play.** Student responses to the play were scaffolded by the teacher through various stages beginning with preparing to act out the text, preparing for the roles, learning the lines, carrying out the performance and eliciting post performance responses.

The teacher urged the students to reflect on the prejudices they may have faced in life to stimulate their thoughts about the play text. Shee Lee responded by relating her first week in school when she felt "the other girls looked down on me as I came from remove class and could not speak English properly". The students were given copies of the play text and they were told to focus on the language, theme and characters.

The students formed groups according to their respective roles in the production. The actors interpreted the text and brainstormed creative ways to say their lines and use actions to convey the characters. The students were given 10 days to learn the lines. The actors were told to study the script and determine if any features need to be added or deleted. They were reminded not to detract from the spirit of the actual text. The remaining students were given the option of performing the roles of production crew, or audience. The audience were assigned the task of reviewing the play so that they too were engaged in reading and understanding the play text.
The student actors, both novices and competent performers engaged in lively, meaningful discussions which were punctuated by gestures and animated expressions. They deconstructed and reconstructed the text collaboratively as they shared their responses.

They revealed an awareness of communicating with the audience when they decided to incorporate a happy ending to the play as the “audience may not understand or appreciate the twist at the end of the story”. Prema, who acted as Bholo, asserted that a scene depicting Rahman’s reunion with his family “would move the audience and we can also score more points in the competition”. Her remark indicated awareness of theme (importance of strong family ties) as well as their competitive spirit. These adaptations were allowed by teacher to allow students to take ownership of the text and to invest themselves fully in the performance.

The dynamics of group work was evident when the natural groups of cast and production crew consulted the director, Sri Dewi, who coordinated their efforts. She coaxed the actors to articulate the words well and to display suitable facial expressions. Sri Dewi also played a facilitator’s role in helping the students assimilate comprehensible output pitched at their competency level (Krashen, 1985). She succeeded in making the actors feel less intimidated and inhibited. She also spurred them on by fanning their competitive spirit. She advised the costumes crew to obtain colourful outfits and even lent her brother’s kurta to Nisha. She also reminded the production crew to check the music tapes to ensure they were in optimum condition.

During one rehearsal, Prema and Sui Yin who played the role of the servants clowned around in the background. Their antics caused the cast to collapse in giggles and earned a reprimand from the director. The students were asked to discuss the strategy of comic relief that they had just witnessed. Prema argued that it should be included as “it would lighten things up and the audience would be entertained as there is so much heavy stuff in the play”.

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Her response showed that she was conscious of how an audience would respond to a serious play. It also suggested that she was aware that performance was a bridge between the actors and the audience. The comic relief scene was retained as they felt that it would restore the balance of an overall serious play. This insightful student’s response to the play only surfaced during their rehearsal. Comic relief is important as it functions as a hook to capture student interest and engagement and affection (Andreas, cited in Salome & Davis, 1997). The students stayed back after school for rehearsals including a full dress rehearsal in which they used the other resources like the props and music. They enjoyed acting and staging the play and were often ribbed by their peers.

The actual performance of the play took place in July 2002. The students put up a magnificent show to a captive audience. Christine tugged at the hearts of many as she transformed into a child who taught the adults about the importance of love, family ties and friendship. She was adroit at empathising, and interpreting Mini’s character playing the part of the precocious child well. The combined efforts of the team resulted in a memorable performance. It indicated that students would be able to display their interpretation of the text through performance if they are given opportunities, encouragement and guidance to do so.

The students were asked to pen their written responses to the performance to ascertain whether they comprehended the literary elements foregrounded in the performance. Christine who played the role of Mini wrote:

putting up the play helped me to understand the story better. Sri Dewi asked me to do the role of Mini which I reluctantly agreed to as I wasn’t sure I could do it... I am a Chinese and the role was that of an Indian child. However, with the guidance of Sri Dewi and the teacher I was able to put up a creditable performance. I was able to understand the character well... the discussions and working together opened my
eyes to a new way of looking at literature books . . . words on a page remain words only . . . Dramatising it made the story more real and meaningful. I feel confident about studying literature books.

Christine’s response showed that even competent actors work hard at “getting into character”. In the process, she developed empathy for Mini a child of a different race, culture and religion through performance. Another notion underscored by the student is that words remain mere words or ink spots on a page (Rosenblatt, 1978) and performance which entailed grappling with meaning making with texts and immersion in acting had facilitated the ability for text to take on life—an experience that was enjoyable and meaningful to her. It had motivated her to read literary tomes.

Stella, a member of the audience found the performance a memorable experience. She opined,

when I first read the text, I could not imagine the story very well. It seemed alien to me . . . when I saw the drama (performance) it became clearer and interesting. I also became involved in the story. I could understand the themes and characters. The characters became more real and alive. I was able to appreciate a father’s love more deeply. The scenes will remain in my mind and I can easily recall it. Seeing and experiencing it are definitely better than just reading about it and being bored to death. This experience has helped me to understand literature . . . because I can now dramatise [perform] it in my head and imagine it being acted out.

Her comments revealed that performance helped her to visualise the story and seeing it being acted brought it alive and made it memorable. It also empowered her to explore literature. Mei Ling showed a good grasp of the elements foregrounded in the text after reviewing the performance. She described Mini as:
an inquisitive five year old. She is very bubbly and intelligent . . . she is frightened of Rahman at first but soon his bribe convinces her to open up and they become good friends.

She explained one theme briefly,

prejudice is a prevalent issue [theme] in the story. The Kabulliwallah was a travelling peddler of a different race and religion and so people were prejudiced against him (See Appendix D for the full text).

The outcomes of out-of-class performance were also insightful. Cast, production crew and audience were fully involved in the sense making process. The audience did not play the role of passive and disinterested recipients of the performance. Performance had nurtured their sensory perception of texts and they savoured texts vicariously. It also generated cognitive responses from students as they utilised the techniques of picturing and imaging (Wilhelm, 1997) to understand the texts. Besides, performance also nurtured affective values in them as they became involved in the play. Their feelings of empathy and compassion for others would probably encourage them to forge better ties with family and others in their lives. Their involvement with performance through the roles they played also increased their confidence in articulating their responses to literature. Performance also nurtured interest in literature and motivated students to read more such texts. Students therefore should be allowed to play the roles of readers, actors, directors and mediators of text (Brown, 1989).

4.4.3 Developing Student Responses through Choral Speaking

The master of ceremony called upon the sixth team to perform on stage. Suddenly there was pin drop silence as the team from Sri Murni arranged themselves in three rows and greeted the audience. Hilyah, the team leader gave a signal and the synchronised, clear and well modulated voices of forty students began with “listen to
our tale of deceit, greed, and sweet revenge”. The students were in their element as they cleverly melded their movements, facial expressions, tones of voice and mimicry of sounds to bring alive the chilling tale of an avaricious woman who murdered her husband and step-child and how poetic justice was served in the end. Before concluding the poem, they paused for dramatic effect before telling the audience “Ladies and gentlemen, Suzanne’s death still remains a mystery”. The audience responded with thunderous applause to show their appreciation to the team.

(Fieldnotes, July, 2002)

The above performance was part of the winning team’s presentation at the district-level choral speaking competition in July, 2002. The Form Four H students were part of the team performing the narrative poem with dramatic elements. This section explicates the findings on student responses to literature through choral speaking. It traces their responses to choral speaking through the roles they played and the processes they were engaged in as well as their written responses to poetry.

**Performing a Choral Recitation of a Poem.** In teaching the poem, (Greed), the teacher decided to use choral recitation to shape student responses. The text was selected to help eliminate student phobia for poetry. The pre-performance activities began with selection of text for the competition. The researcher chose a text penned by students that would enable them to appreciate poetry which many learners found “difficult and boring”. They had expressed enthusiasm for drama but shied away from poetry. I decided to utilise choral speaking as it involves the use of poetry as drama (Gasparro & Falletta, 1994). The literary elements foregrounded in the poem were theme, character, setting and literary devices. As choral speaking foregrounds fluency, it was used as a pedagogical strategy to motivate and sustain these articulate students’ interest in poetry.
The first activity that was carried out prior to performance was deep breathing from the diaphragm. This was done to help them to articulate the words clearly with confidence. As a point of entry into the text, the teacher asked the students to recall the sordid tale of Mona Fandey, a notorious Malaysian who had featured in local news. It was effective in stimulating interest and connecting text with life. The subsequent steps in preparing for choral speaking included auditioning, scripting the text, assigning voice to text, preparing the speech choir, blending facial expressions, gestures and movement with language. The students went through auditioning to determine their natural voice tones. Forty students were finally selected to be in the team.

The script writers adapted the script by highlighting the child’s plight through words and sound effects that reiterated her innocence and subsequent death. They collectively negotiated the lines to be spoken by each row. The students were asked to discern the voices of the different personas in the poem. This helped them become aware of the poet’s use of voice to highlight the elements of character, theme and setting in the poem. The script writers marked the lines to be spoken by each row in the margins of the text. Copies of the annotated scripts were distributed to the team. The learners then discussed the assigning of voices especially the solo voices and sound effects to be produced with specific students who would highlight the dramatic elements in the poem.

The students rehearsed by reciting their lines in their respective groups. They also experimented with different ways of saying the words. They grappled with different movements, sounds, facial expressions and gestures. Noise levels would increase but active learning took place as they went through their rehearsals. As they rehearsed, they also discussed the nuances of the language and ways to articulate the words in order to enhance the
impact on the audience. They constantly sought feedback from their audience about their performance.

The entire speech choir would practise together in the last 15 minutes of each practice session. The three rows would come together to meld their voices and coordinate their lines, movements and facial expressions. This was the most challenging part of the rehearsals. The practise sessions were energetic and noisy as they strove to fine-tune their performance repeatedly. The members of the team were multi-ethnic, comprising both competent learners and weak students. Choral speaking is an activity that would empower both categories of learners (Chitravelu, Sithamparam & Teh, 1995). The students displayed great enthusiasm and enjoyment in mimicking the sounds ranging from the howling winds to the screams of the terrified child.

Choral speaking generated several outcomes including enjoyment and increased confidence in responding to poetry, taking ownership of text and a heightened sensitivity to literary features nested in the poem. The students did not show any of the initial resistance to poetry. They displayed enthusiasm in memorising and performing the text. Almost all the rehearsals were well attended. Many students declared that "it was the best [performance] activity". Some went to great lengths to express their love for the performance such as coming for practice sessions on Sundays and skipping tuition classes. They would offer apt suggestions to improve their presentation especially when their peers erred repeatedly over certain sections of the texts. They consulted their team mates to improve their performance rather than seek pointers from their teacher.

Another outcome was the learners also showed an increased sensitivity to poetic devices such as imagery, refrain and repetition. They were able to work out the devices and the use of iambic pentameter collaboratively. They would probably not have done it in their
usal literature lessons. The students took ownership of text through performance as they would actively seek feedback from their teacher and audience about “our poem”.

As a post performance task, the students were asked to write their responses to the performed text. Jennifer described her “poetic experience” as:

I learnt how to pronounce my words properly and appreciate English [language] more after going through the practices. The essence of literature combined with the melodramatics of drama can produce interesting results. .. poems can never be the same again for one who has choral speaking experience. One would be able to feel the poet’s emotions better and dwell into the deeper meanings of the poem. .. choral speaking brings English to life. .. (See Appendix H)

The student’s response revealed that there was emotional engagement with the poem. Choral speaking had helped the learner to improve her speaking skills and enhanced her oral interpretation of the poem. Scholarship also suggests that it is a useful activity in teaching grammar and the nuances of the language (Van Oort, 2002). Christina perceived it as an activity which changed attitudes to literature. She said,

It is the only time the most unconfident [diffident] girl in the school had the ability to believe in herself. We explored poetry and the forms it is expressed is fun. .. choral speaking has opened my mind to poetry and the world of literature.

She found choral speaking beneficial as it helped her to explore texts in an enjoyable way. It increased her confidence in exploring other poems. Many students still continue to recite lines from the poem when they see their team mates or the teacher.

Students’ written responses on text revealed that they had comprehended and interpreted literary elements in the text well through performance. Mei Ling commented,
The repetition of the line “Mama! Mama” has a haunting effect. When the dolls repeat the line, it creates an eerie feeling. The imagery used is interesting. The colour pink is a warm, happy and soft one. It is contrasted with the san and gloomy ending. The howling winds and wolves, the creaking door and the whistling of wind through the trees all help to create [a] ghostly scene. The main characters in the poem are George Forrestier, a wealthy widower with a young daughter, Suzanne, the second wife of George, an evil manipulative woman who wanted to inherit all her husband’s wealth and Arlene, a five year old motherless girl longing for love. The themes of the poem are greed can cause a person’s ruin, greed can destroy happiness and a person who commits a crime will be punished. The messages are: one should not be greedy and you reap what you sow. The setting of the poem is 19th century France, a fabulous mansion set on a cliff with beautiful surroundings (See Appendix 1).

Conclusion

In sum, dramatisation and choral speaking allowed students to perceive and respond to drama, short story and poetry experientially. They were able to relate poetry and drama to life and improve their command of the language. Literature became an enjoyable and interesting subject through their active participation in performance.

4.5 Perceptions Regarding the Use of Performance

As mentioned earlier, it is vital to ascertain how the key players, the teacher and the student participants perceive the use of performance in the teaching and learning of literature as an epilogue to the main argument. This section discusses their perceptions.

“Literature began in performance and as performance” contends Skinner (1987, p. 164). This suggests that literature and performance are complementary. While in-class performances drew on the use of voice, facial expressions and actions to display their
interpretation of the text, out-of-class performances incorporated theatre resources and was performed before a larger audience.

4.5.1 Teacher Perceptions on Performance

Teacher perceptions on performance indicated her observations of student response and the challenges she discerned in utilising this strategy in her lessons.

**Student Involvement and Enjoyment.** The teacher's response on the use of performance as a strategy in her class was a positive one. She noted,

> I noticed, that they [students] had fun when they performed *Examination Day* just like when they performed *The Lamp* [during the study]...They were not bored. In the beginning, they were reluctant to write the script and produce [perform] the play but slowly I saw that they were enjoying it. It [performance] makes it [lessons] more interesting. Lessons become lively and they are actively involved.

Her response suggested that performances allowed students' participation which also sustained their interest in literary works. They enjoyed working together exploring the literary elements in the texts. Her remark relating to students' involvement in their own learning so that they did not rely on the teacher's analysis of the text indicated that she was aware that collaborative learning could be explored further in her class. The teacher's early reservations about utilising performance in class was countered by the students' enthusiasm and motivation in writing their own scripts, adapting authentic texts and being actively involved in performances.

Even shy and weak learners displayed interest in collaborative work sharing their responses with peers. They showed initiative in improvising props in the classroom to make their performances interesting and realistic. For instance, Mee Lee used a calendar to
represent the portrait and a vase to depict a mug in their performance of the play (Educating Rita).

Thus, Sanam said “I’ll try doing more of it this year” indicating that she was positive that performance could be incorporated in literature classes to nurture and develop student responses to texts. However, she felt, there were constraints.

**Time Constraints.** The classroom practitioner cited time constraints as a significant factor that did not allow her to use performance-based activities in her classes. She stated,

> This batch no lah . . . I have no time . . . three periods. I focus on giving notes after I have explained the important elements [of the text]. They [the girls] only want to focus on the text. They only want notes . . . the majority of them”.

She had earlier asserted that performance was a “useful activity”. However, she perceived that the limited time should best be utilised to deliver what the students’ requested rather than motivate them to explore their responses. Brown (1989) suggests that the temptation to resort to lecturing in the belief that it would help weak learners should be resisted.

The teacher also said that as the adviser of the Drama club, she carried out activities like “Win, Lose or Draw or Charades”. I also give endings of stories and ask them [students] to do a half hour sketch in groups”. While performance was not central to her lessons, they featured in the club activity.

Sanam’s remark that the students’ request for teacher-based explication of texts and the dictation of notes seemed dissonant to my observations of her lessons and the students’ responses to the same activities. Besides, the students even the weak ones were seen to be actively involved in group discussions and in the performances. However, her comment
suggests that the teacher possibly values a transmissive pedagogy over the use of performance despite her recognising its value.

*Examination Constraints.* The classroom practitioner cited examination pressure as the other constraint for not utilising performance in and out-of-class. She said,

we are [members of] an exam-oriented society and so I have to focus on analysing the texts and giving notes to my students so that they can revise for the exams.

She seemed to place great emphasis on completing the syllabus and preparing the students for the public examination at the end of the following year. Her decision to gear her students’ to focus primarily on the *SPM* examination was probably compounded by the marked slump in the Sri Murni students’ academic performance in literature over the past two years. In 2000, 88% of the students passed the paper while 80% of the candidates secured passes in literature the following year. The decline was aggravated by the fact that the literature paper recorded the biggest dip in performance in comparison with the other subjects in the *SPM* examination in 2001. Consequently, the teacher had to prepare a report explaining the students’ deteriorating performance. When asked to comment on the students’ results, she stated that the students were to be blamed as “they do not bother to read the texts or the notes.”

An examination of her text questions showed that she adhered to the examination format and the written work that she had set her students primarily focused on comprehension questions and context questions. The students kept a separate file for their literature notes (See Appendix F for samples).

**4.5.2 Student Perceptions on Performance.**

Student perceptions on performance were impacted by their literature lessons and the performance-based activities that they participated in and out-of-class. They asserted that the
benefits of performance included enjoyment, close interaction with literary texts, texts coming alive in class, being able to display their acting and theatre-based talents and being able to articulate their responses to texts.

**Student Enjoyment** The students argued that literature lessons minus performance were boring as the teacher talk dominated and stifled their responses. Mei Lin said, “most of the time (85%) it is the teacher who talks and only 15% of the time, we answer her questions”. Christine lamented,

> “we do not get to act out parts especially the climax of stories which I think are important. We are just told the meanings of the lines. During performance, we are involved in the lessons and we get to share our views about stories with our friends.

We do not feel bored. It is enjoyable all the same to take part in plays [performances].

The students felt frustrated at having their responses marginalized during lessons. The teacher had previously stated that she utilised a line-by-line analysis for plays and poetry explaining difficult terms in texts. Students’ views were underscored by scholarship (Burton, 1967) that such lessons could be boring, tedious, and depressing “until the play [text] lost [loses] all vitality or appeal”.

Sri Dewi felt that the emphasis on examinations aggravated the boring lessons. She said,

> One must see beyond passing exams. One must learn to express [one’s] own opinions on the texts, be able to explain issues in texts in one’s own words and be able to talk and write about the texts. We can only do this through performance in class.

She was stressing the merits of performance which helped her articulate her views, feelings and thoughts about issues and people as she had earlier expressed her views about the merits of studying literature. She had been actively engaged in and displayed her competence
in the roles she played in the performance-based activities both in-class and out-of-class. The student was dissatisfied with studying literature merely to pass examinations. She opined,

If the teacher explains all the time, it is not good either. I don’t see any use in absorbing all the facts given by her and vomiting it in the exam. You can get an A but you will not enjoy or appreciate the texts.

Students’ responses indicate that they felt that performance-based activities helped them enjoy and respond better to literature. Their oral and written responses suggested that performances enabled them to be actively involved rather than be backbenchers in their own learning.

**Student Engagement.** All four participants affirmed that performance experiences allowed them to read and appreciate literary works. They stated that they had to peruse texts closely and visualise the scenes before they could perform the texts. The students had previously indicated that they utilised the techniques of picturing and imaging to visualise the texts. Stella quipped, “I am an observer watching the story. I am present as the action takes place. I know exactly what’s happening in the story”. Performance allowed them to transform their imaginative interpretation of the text to visual and oral presentation of the same texts. The student participants also felt that their performance experiences had motivated them to read and embark on a literary journey confidently. Their shared responses to text had helped them to read other literary tomes on their own as well.

**Class Involvement.** Christine stated,

Performance is important as the whole class is involved... either as actors, [production crew] or the audience. As we discuss and perform the story, the whole class will pay attention [to the lesson] and we will remember the scenes very well.
My observations of the class supported her opinion as the students were actively involved in culling meaning from texts in their different roles and competed with one another to stage their performances in-class as well as out-of-class. They did not resort to gossip, stare listlessly at the teacher or watch the goings-on-outside the class.

**Bringing Alive Texts.** Performance was perceived as an interesting technique that gave body and meaning to the texts. Sri Dewi remarked, “We discuss how to bring the play [text] alive so that the audience will enjoy the performance. When we do the text, we connect, we see it, and we understand and learn from it”. The other students also echoed similar sentiments when they said that it helped them “step into the shoes of the characters and understand the text better”. They showed awareness that the students’ collaborative efforts in grappling with meaning making with text enhanced by incorporating non-verbal cues (Bushman & Bushman, 1997) that would make the text real and meaningful as well as capture the attention of the audience. Performance enabled her to utilise her vast experience as a versatile and talented actress to respond to texts both visually and through her voice and appropriate actions. It also allowed her (as the director of the play) to assess the impact on the audience and learn from it through their feedback. It would help her to enhance her acting skills as well.

Performance enabled students to be transported into the world of the characters. One student participant declared that dramatisation of texts had allowed her “to switch from one character to another and I could see the characters well” as she watched the performance with her peers. The storyline had become clearer and she was able to discern and be captivated by character development as the performers brought the world of the characters into the classroom through the performance which unfolded in the classroom. Performance can transform a classroom into a theatre and allow students to see and hear the text (Styan cited in Salomone & Davis, 1997).
Facilitating Student Responses. The student participants perceived that they were able to respond well both orally and through writing to literature because of their performance experiences. Students who had initially been able to express monosyllabic or choral answers were able to speak and write their individual responses confidently about literature. For instance, Sri Dewi was able to articulate her thoughts about her choral speaking experience in an article to the school magazine entitled “We made it”. Mei Lin, the reserved student was able to write a full page about the characters of Frank and Rita after viewing the performance of the play (Educating Rita) in class. (See Appendices J and K). Mei Lin also stated that participating in performances has encouraged her ‘to write and draw [illustrate] my own stories and poems. I will write my stories during the school holidays” she added.

Conclusion

Both teacher and students felt that performance was an enjoyable strategy to develop their creative and informed responses to literature. Performance eliminated boredom as the students were fully involved in bringing the text alive in class. This strategy allowed them to read, explore and appreciate prescribed texts as well as other texts confidently. It also enabled the students to explore the notion of potential for meaning (Brown, 1989) both in their oral and written responses to texts.