

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This exploration of the use of performance to shape the personal responses of adolescent girls to literary texts was driven by four questions. These research questions probed teacher and student perceptions of literature, the shaping of student responses to literature through in-class performance, the shaping of student responses to literature through out-of-class performance experiences and teacher and student perceptions of the use of performance in literature teaching and learning. This chapter thus presents a summary of the key findings. It culls from these findings to offer recommendations for the main stakeholders in literature education: the curriculum designers, teacher educators and literature teachers.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This section encapsulates the key findings culled from the study.

5.1.1 Teacher and Student Perceptions of Literature in the Curriculum

The teacher and student participants had positive responses to the study of literature. The classroom practitioner delineated the language dimension as the primary benefit of studying literature. She maintained that it allowed students to enhance their command of the English language. She also noted that literature offered her the scope to inculcate moral values in her students incidentally as well as allowed them to explore issues of life which would help them to make informed choices.

Similarly, the students found that the study of literature helped them to master the English language as well as nurture their love for reading. They also felt that it allowed them to understand and appreciate the cultures of others. In addition, literature texts allowed them to explore their ideas which emerged through literary reading. The key participants also affirmed that literature allowed them to reflect on moral values and make informed decisions

in life as it allowed them to view life through multiple perspectives which also sustained their interest in texts. In sum, the students perceived the study of literature as one that nurtured and shaped their literary and linguistic competence as well as their moral, cultural, affective and intellectual development.

5.1.2 Student Responses to Literature through Performance In-Class

The findings related to students' responses to in-class performances revealed that performance allowed them to be actively engaged with texts collaboratively. The roles of performers, production crew and audience that they played in class also enabled them to grapple with meaning making, and interpretation of text which were subsequently displayed through their performance. This facilitated learner autonomy as they took responsibility for their own learning and acquired ownership of texts that they scripted or adapted.

5.1.3 Student Responses to Literature through Performance Out-of-Class

The findings related to student responses to out-of-class performance augmented those of in-class performance. The students found dramatisation and choral speaking enjoyable as they were scaffolded in the various processes through the roles of performers, production crew, director, team leader and audience that they performed for these activities. The students showed an increased sensitivity to poetic devices through their "poetic experience". Performance changed their initial phobia for poetry into a rich and engaging intellectual, imaginative and sensory experience. They were also emotionally engaged with texts and were able to empathise with the characters in the texts. Performance also enabled them to display their acting talents as well as other theatre related skills. They also displayed increased confidence in articulating their oral and written responses to literary elements. The students were also transformed from inattentive, bored listeners to active, motivated and deeply interested learners.

5.1.4 Teacher and Student Perceptions Regarding the Use of Performance

The teacher affirmed that performance enabled all her students to be involved in the lessons. Literature lessons that incorporated performance were interesting and lively. However, she perceived time and examination constraints as challenges that restricted her use of this strategy in her class.

The students were unanimous in stating that performance was an interesting and enjoyable strategy. They stated that performance enabled them to enjoy their lessons. In addition, their usual teacher-fronted lessons marginalised their responses. Performance allowed them to peruse the text closely and in turn understand and appreciate them as they had to elicit meaning from text, interpret and stage it before an audience. This also facilitated whole class involvement in the lessons as all the students had to respond to text through their respective roles of performers, production crew and audience. The printed text came alive as they watched the performance. It also allowed students to be transported to the world of the characters without the teacher as the mediator between the students and the text. The students also felt that they were able to move beyond their initial monosyllabic and notes-dependent responses to articulate extended individual personal responses both orally and in written form confidently. They were also motivated to explore other literary texts on their own.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings of the study would have a significant impact on the three key stakeholders in the teaching and learning of literature. They are curriculum developers, teacher educators and literature teachers. This section explores the implications of the study for the key players involved in literature education.

5.2.1 Implications of the Study for Curriculum Developers

The Literature in English Syllabus, 1990 has provisions for teachers to utilise performance in-class as well as in out-of-class activities. It stipulates that teachers should sensitise students to the dramatic element in plays and the poetic devices and hone students' responses to literature through student-centred activities. However, since performance is not assessed in the public examinations, the suggestions largely remain unexplored in literature classes, much to the frustration and detriment of students as they are unable to participate fully in their own learning.

The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) could create a network of teachers and get them involved in preparing teaching files and supporting teaching learning materials and in devising activities that would develop student responses to literature. Teachers who have explored performance-based activities that generate students responses to literature such as readers' theatre, mime, simulation, role play, dramatisation and choral speaking could be invited to conduct demonstrations or presentations of such activities to other literature teachers. This would motivate resistant and examination-driven teachers to see beyond examinations and allow students to perceive literature as an interesting study about people and life. Further, assessment could incorporate performance in the form of portfolio assessment. This would offer a balanced evaluation of students' literary and linguistic competencies.

Since scholarship (Toye, Prendiville, 2000) indicates that even pre-schoolers can engage meaningfully in role play and dramatisation, performance could be incorporated as a component in the primary school literature syllabus as well. This would ensure that students who have been exposed to the literary genres at a young age would be able to articulate critical and creative responses competently when they step into secondary school. These students who are competent in the language and in literature would then be able to express

their responses to literature by venturing into producing their own texts in the various genres in secondary school independently as well as collaboratively. In addition, CDC could seek feedback from students through research about their responses to performances to ascertain their learning needs and interests. The syllabus document can then be redesigned to underscore their needs through appropriate learning objectives and outcomes that reflect student needs and preferences.

5.2.2 Implications of the Study for Teacher Educators

Teacher educators could conduct courses that foreground strategies including performance that would shape student responses to literature on a regular basis. These pre-service and in-service courses should highlight student-centred strategies and activities that would help nurture and shape students responses to literature rather than focus on methodological stances that underscore teacher's knowledge about the prescribed texts and the literary elements. The teachers would then be encouraged to utilise such strategies in their classes. CDC should also elicit feedback from teachers who utilise performance in class, prepare reports based on their findings and share these findings with the other literature stakeholders especially in teacher education.

Teacher trainees should also be exposed to the current pedagogical innovations in the teaching of literature. In addition, they should also be familiarised with learning theories that emphasise student involvement in their own learning. Teachers equipped with sound pedagogical knowledge and learning theories complimented by practicum experiences that allow them to play out their strategies in class would be prepared to face the challenges of teaching literature to ESL students.

The courses on literature should also give equal emphasis to the four literary genres. The trainees should be taught theatre-based skills including acting and the designing of sets,

props, and costumes. Teachers who are familiar with such techniques would be able to help their learners bring the texts alive in class rather than resort to chalk and talk and in the process frustrate and bore the students to tears.

The CDC could collaborate with teacher training colleges and schools in training key personnel who would be able to implement the cascade model for teaching literature more effectively. At present CDC only conducts courses when it has to implement new innovations to literature teaching or to familiarise teachers with the new set of prescribed texts for a new literature cycle (the duration of a cycle is three years).

There is no follow up sessions to ascertain how literature is played out in the classrooms nationwide. This situation needs to be addressed as the number of students taking literature as an elective is declining rapidly. Regular meeting with teachers would help teacher educators to redress any flaws and offer meaningful feedback and other forms of vital support to literature teachers.

5.2.3 Implications of the Study for Literature Teachers

The study revealed that teachers need to change their mindsets about teaching literature through explication of texts and the dictating notes provided by CDC or guide books. The advent of the new millennium and globalisation that foreground learner autonomy can no longer be ignored. Teachers should focus on helping students make meaning of texts independently and in groups instead of perpetuating the interpretations of the main knowledge giver. Performance is an effective strategy that has proven to engage students in texts, helped them interpret, transform and present their interpretation of text to an audience. It has shown that students have gained confidence in articulating their responses to texts effectively instead of being mere listeners and note-takers.

Teachers should also be proactive and take the initiative in forging a literature network with other literature teachers. Through effective networking, they could share their teaching and learning resources including films and video tapes to enliven literature lessons. Teachers could also organise trips to allow their students to watch live performances in the theatre so as to enable students to savour the aesthetic and dramatic experiences. They should strive to move away from teacher-fronted lessons by encouraging student to dramatise texts in class as well as talk and write about their personal responses to texts. Teachers are the agents of change and their decisions have far reaching consequences. Performance is one strategy that would help them to make literature encounters both meaningful and relevant to them.

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, performance is an invaluable strategy that can be employed in literature classes to assist students to understand, appreciate and enjoy the study of literary texts. Teachers can utilise this technique to shape the learners responses to literature by scaffolding them effectively from the page to the stage and back to the page in a meaningful and interesting manner. Performance also functions as a bridge by helping students to move from the reader response dimension to the interpretive, visual, kinetic and reflective dimensions that would shape their informed responses to literature collectively and confidently. Performance also empowers students as they are able to take ownership of texts as well. Therefore, utilising performance in literature classes will develop student responses to literary texts and transform literature classes from boring, listless, ones to highly interactive, meaningful and exciting places of learning.