

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This qualitative inquiry was conducted within the space of a Form Four ESL class and it explored the use of dialogue journal writing in shaping learners' responses to literary texts in the literature class. The study was driven by two specific research questions that focused on the use of dialogue journal writing in helping learners interpret literary text and how dialogue journal writing acts as a springboard to facilitate small group discussion.

In the first part, I will discuss the steps taken to engage the learners in the process of dialogue journal writing. Then, in the second part, I will discuss learners' written responses to literary texts and learners' responses to texts in *group discussions*.

The steps taken to engage learners in dialogue journal writing.

The steps taken in this study to engage learners in dialogue journal writing are as follows. First, the learners read the text. Then, they write their journal entries by answering some open ended questions. This is followed by the collection of the journals by the teacher who then writes a feedback to the

learners. The learners again write back to the teacher based on the feedback received. Finally, learners use the responses in their journals as a base to participate in small group discussions. In this study, my main objective was to discover if feedback from me in the form of questions, opinions and comments would help learners to construct their own knowledge, build bridges and make connections and thus respond in a thoughtful and reflective manner. The four learners who participated in this study were Veni, Yasha, Ai Ling and Li Hoon.

Learners' Written Responses to Literary Texts

Reader response theorists emphasize the interaction of reader, text and context in the reader's unique construction of the meaning of what is read. Great importance is placed on what a reader brings to the text as meaning is located within the reader's interpretation rather than in the text. Brumfit (1985,p.108) says that,

The fundamental ability of a good reader of literature is the ability to generalize from the given text to either other aspects of the literary tradition or personal or social significance outside literature.

In examining learners' interpretations to the two literary texts, *The Necklace* and *The Drover's Wife*, both short stories, I noted several dimensions of responses. In this segment, the discussion will centre on learners' written responses in their dialogue journals which were further validated by verbal

responses in interviews. The learners' responses are analyzed according to major recurring themes. Essentially, the findings reveal that in responding to literary texts, learners make connections to their lives and arrive at "a new understanding" (Bereiter, 1994) as a result of the dialogic process involved in dialogue journal writing. Hence, in the following section I will discuss the various dimensions of learners' responses: making emotional connections, examining issues and alternative actions and passing moral and ethical judgments.

Making Emotional Connections

Learners who were previously passive in class during literature displayed a relatively inordinate amount of emotions in their written responses. Excerpts from learners' journals provide evidence of such emotional connections to their reading. All the learners expressed strong negative feelings towards Mathilde Loisel in *The Necklace*. In Li Hoon's (see Appendix C) journal, (all the excerpts from learners' journals are unedited) she writes,

I hate this story. I feel that the Mathilde Loisel very greedy and discontented with her station in life. She always thinks the materialistic in her life and never take care of his husband.

This feeling is also shared by Veni (see Appendix A) who says,

The story makes me angry with Madame Loisel...She is self-centered, materialistic, [has] too much pride and easily irritated. She must understand

her husband and the life she's got and makes the life happy forever. But she is not do like that...The story remind me about the greedy womans like Madame Loisel in the world. More of the womens in this world are greedy , always needs the jewellery things and more.

The feeling of anger is taken a step further by Yasha (see Appendix B) who feels that the writer's perception of women in general is negative as he has portrayed the character Madame Loisel in an uncomplimentary manner.

The story is make me angry with the character Madame Loisel because the wroter sawing the role of woman as greedy and envious in the society.

Dialogue journal writing allowed learners a safe avenue to voice their personal feelings with regards to the story read. As learners wrote their responses, they involved themselves intellectually and emotionally in order to construct their own understanding of the events in the story. According to Burns (1999), "literature offers a look at characters of depth whom we can admire or despise with a passion...It gives us insight into our own character and the character of others" (p.119).

Whilst making emotional connections to characters, learners were also able to show empathy and visualize themselves in the role of the characters. All the learners empathized with Mr. Loisel, the kind, loving and generous man in *The Necklace*. In the case of Veni, she could relate to Mr. Loisel and felt emotionally connected to him as he reminded her of her father. Her response in the journal reveals her thoughts and feelings.

My father is like Mr. Loisel. My father is a kind, patient, unselfish and a simple man. My father also a loving and caring person. My father like the contented life that is he happy with the simple life.

In a later interview with her, I tried to probe deeper into her response and these were her thoughts.

All woman are like Mathilde ..ah..madam?... I don't know why woman are greedy ...always ask for this and that ...gold chain and gelang [bangles]...sometimes my mother also...so greedy. (said almost in a whisper)

She is able to understand and empathize as certain aspects of her real life experiences are similar to that of the story. Along a similar vein, Yasha was able to relate to the main character in *The Drover's Wife* in the course of dialoging with me in her journal. My probing questions helped her to elucidate her personal experiences in connection with the text.

Yasha: The drover's wife is a very loving and caring person. She is always concerned about her children... She is a good mother...

I: Do you think all mothers are like her? Can you give examples of mothers who are like her and those who are very different from her based on your life experiences?

Yasha: In my opinion, not all mothers like the drover's wife. Because in he world not all woman doing good things in their life... Some

people did not take care of their children in their life... For the examples of mothers who are like the drover's wife is my mother. Because she is same like the drover's wife character. That's mean she is a caring and loving mother despite the hardship she faces. Because my mother always concerned about her children. But my mother is not brave like the drover's wife. Because my mother character on very soft. In her life got something is a very bad thing. That is my brother passed from the world. My mother always take care and concerned my brother very carefully and loving. But one day, my brother was passed away from we all. The day is very black day in my mother's life... We cannot compare the mother loves at the children with other things in the life. In this conclusion the drover's wife some characteristic same like my mother's character.

In articulating her sympathies for the drover's wife, Li Hoon connects her life experiences to the story. (see Appendix C)

... the drover's wife was very responsible as a good mother for the childrens. I remember... my relative were same to this story. My relative's husband were go to another's place to work is not usually come back and his wife were take care of the several children in the house. If her children have some problem like her children sick she can also settle the problem... I feel very sympathy

for her because she is a good mother and she not many friend around her , like the drover's wife in the bush.

Ai Ling on the other hand, has strong negative feelings towards the drover probably due to encountering similar circumstances in her life and her knowledge of the world we live in. (see Appendix D) Many of her friends come from either single parent homes or troubled homes where the father is normally an irresponsible parent who drinks excessively or one who can't provide enough for the family. Even her boyfriend, who is a form five boy, comes from a troubled family background. Being a relatively affluent contractor, his father is a womanizer and as a result his mother has to live a life of shame as everyone in the small community is aware what is happening.

I hate this story because of the drover. He is not take care about the family at all and didn't prepare the best things for their family. He didn't even think about the dangerous places. Such has many snakes in the desert is not suitable for their family... The drover also remind about some guy or man which without take care of the family or their wife and always just do the things that they likes and will hurts others but they don't know... And they always do the things that they feel is correct so they didn't discuss with their family and their wife.

Learners are able to comprehend as well as empathize with the characters in the stories because they have personal knowledge which links them to the story.

However, they had to be prompted with questions and comments in order to get them to make the link between the text and their lives. Thus, the “dialogue” in the journals helped learners to respond to literary texts in a more personally relevant way by relating literature to their lives, turning the reading episode into a meaningful experience for them.

Examining Issues and Alternative Actions

In the course of dialoging in the journals, the participants of the study shared their insights on the ways of managing and coping with the various concerns in life which they encountered in the literary texts. Through the process of writing, gaining feedback from the teacher and writing again in response, the learners examined and probed into alternative courses of actions to that depicted in the stories. Ai Ling, in trying to make sense of Mathilde’s decision to marry Mr. Loisel, who was only a lowly clerk, grappled with the issue of personal choice and fate. In her journal (see Appendix D), she remarks,

It makes me confuse is the part of Mathilde why wants to marry the Mr. Loisel who is the simple person without rich.

In my feedback to her, I made the following remarks:

You seem confused about why Mathilde married Mr. Loisel in the first place. I think she didn’t have any choice. She couldn’t have married someone from a richer background because she herself is from a working class family. In

those days, people did not marry out of their 'class'. Moreover, almost every woman was expected to marry (in those days)....Do you think that women have to marry to be happy?

Ai Ling writes back to me saying,

I don't think so because she [Mathilde] marries with Mr. Loisel sadly. Then why she wants to make this choice. She can also live on her own better than she always regret about her marriage. (that poor husband)

In this excerpt, Ai Ling makes connections between the text and her personal beliefs when she insists that it would have been better for all if Mathilde had remained single. Due to having married Mr. Loisel halfheartedly, not only must she herself live with regrets but she is also being unfair to her husband by making his life a misery. By contemplating deeply on the actions of the characters, Ai Ling shows emotional maturity when she suggests alternative actions to that depicted in the story.

Veni also shares her thoughts on this issue as she searches for answers to the various questions in her mind.

I'm confused why must she [Mathilde] get married with Mr. Loisel although she know that Mr. Loisel is a simple man, work as a clerk. I don't understand that she married because she like or her parents compel. In my opinion, if anyone married a person with the parents compel surely their life is do not to be happy forever. And all over day they will be in trouble. Their also never

respect to each other. If our life must be happy forever we must choose our life partner with ourself. We must understand our life partner's heart.

Through her reflections in the journal, Ai Ling also remarks that she would try to change her circumstances if she was in Mathilde's place.

I will work together with my husband so that I won't feel so poor... I even can make my own business just like sell anything cake or drinks to get more money because this job is not rare for a woman. So I can buy anything what I like.

Ai Ling's opinions on what could have been done shows that she makes connections between her life experiences and the text; she suggests "selling anything like cake or drinks to get more money..." based on her business background whereby her parents are mobile fishmongers and she herself works as a part-time sales promoter for various products like ice-creams and cakes in a local supermarket.

With regards to the story *The Drover's Wife*, Ai Ling grapples with the issue of divorce as she makes real life connections and mirrors the values of the contemporary society where divorce seems to be an easy option if things do not work out as expected.

If I am drover's wife I will hate my husband because he never think about he family and just think about his job. So I will try to separated or divorced with my husband. Because it really makes me nuts and drive my crazy. But

the children also very pity without a father but for me that is no choice. Another way is I will ask my husband whether needs the job or a family. If he choice the family so I will just forgive him.

In my feedback to her, I questioned if divorce is an easy option for everyone who is in a similar situation as the drover's wife. I also reminded her that there are a lot of poor uneducated people in this world who do not have much of a choice but to leave their families behind to work elsewhere so that they can earn money for their family. Ai Ling's response to this shows a combination of maturity as well as the eternal optimism of the young.

I know he wants to earn money but do the drover think of his family? Right a husband work hard for the family but if one day he earn the money back and unfortunately his wife and the children kill by the snakes then how? Sure he will regret and hate himself by none looking for their family. Sure a person who uneducated has limited for the jobs but the person can think wisely to change his jobs. In the world, there's no such things that cannot happened just see whether a person wants or doesn't want. For example, in the world there's so much people uneducated but they also can success in their life. Also we shouldn't give up and keep trying to make the family happy and safely because the money not shows the anythings. So we should cherish what the family is, just like drover has to cherish his family before they are in trouble... Now I think carefully and widely I was wrong to decide divorced my husband... I will try to discuss with him to change his job. I

will also give him some time to collect money then we can all move to the town.

Whilst examining various issues in the stories and suggesting alternative courses of actions, the learners were intensely engaged with the characters in the texts. There was also serious contemplation on how the characters in the stories could have changed their lives for the better and in a few instances, the reluctant acceptance that sometimes time and place play important roles on how people act and the decisions they make.

Passing Moral and Ethical Judgments

In responding to literature, learners attempted to assimilate moral and ethical values from their lifeworlds with the values depicted in the texts. Through the process of dialoguing with me in their journals, they contemplated and deliberated over these issues in order to make sense of what they have read and the reality as they see it based on their own cultural, religious and societal values and beliefs.

Learners often adopted a judgemental stance towards the characters in the texts. The following responses to *The Necklace* shows that learners oftentimes adopted a rather puritanical “either or” stance; someone was either good or bad, with no excuses or grey areas in between. In Ai Ling’s response regarding Mathilde, she writes,

Mathilde should deserve what she has done because she has lost the necklace belongs to MF so she has to work very hard for ten years to return the money... that's why she looks so poor, dirty and old.

Veni too shares similar sentiments but she implies that if you hunger too much for something, you might just get the opposite. Being a pious girl, her response reflects shades of her upbringing whereby religion plays a central role in suppressing an excessive desire for material possessions.

Madame Loisel had deserve what she got. Because she likes the material things walaupun [although] her life is a simple life. Disebabkan [Because] she more likes with the richest life she get the poor life after the day... I say that too much ambition can destroy our lives because we must happy with what we have, we don't so greedy at the things who never have... I am not so greedy like Madame Loisel. I am like to live in a contented life that is live with what I have.

Li Hoon ,on her part, has definite ideas about what is acceptable and what is not. She had this to say about Mathilde.

I not sympathy for either of them because Mathilde Loisel always think the materialistic or attractive when she go the ball... When she go to the ball, she very action and show her necklace to anyone. Mathilde Loisel deserve working very hard in ten years ... she stops daydreaming about a luxurious life and she always think how to collect the more money... I

think the beautiful people have not an easier life in the world. If anyone always think the skin is beautiful is very imported for yourself, it is wrong.

Li Hoon's response is connected to her family life. She is the second of eight children and the eldest girl and thus she has to shoulder many of the household chores. When she writes, "...I think the beautiful people have not an easier life in the world", she is making connections between the expectations of the character in the story and what is happening in her own life. Being a pretty girl herself, she knows for a fact that beauty does not exempt one from a hard life.

While responding to *The Drover's Wife*, Ai Ling explores my question as to the reasons why the drover's wife does not have a name of her own and thus is referred to as the drover's wife throughout the story. Her belief in the most basic individual right of a human being is reflected in her writing .

In my opinion, drover's wife do not have a name because in the past which woman who marry to man so she must follow the husband's name... Maybe the wife do not know a name is very important for a person... The name for me is very important because my name is given by my parents then why should I follow my husband's name. That's totally unfair for me. Right? Because everyone needs somebody to respect and appreciate them so if I no have a name , how they will respect me and how they will treat me? They won't talk and treat me properly and they will critic me badly and even look down on me. I hate it!

The various dimensions of the learners' responses to literature in their dialogue journals shows evidence of the connections they make between literature and their own lives. By reflecting deeply on the literary texts read, they find the links between what they see, know or experience in the 'real' world as opposed to what they read in the 'fictional' world. By responding thus, they have moved beyond the stage of simply retelling and summarizing the story into the realm of aesthetic reading where they bring their lives into the text and the text into their lives to make the reading experience more personally meaningful.

I feel that the learners gained new insights and developed different viewpoints as they shared and searched for answers in the process of dialoguing with me in their journals. I agree with Taba's (1966, cited in Clegg, 1987) description that questions are "the single most influential teaching act"(p.13) with regards to the power of questions in impacting student thinking and learning. In this study, I found that open-ended thought-provoking questions such as "Do you feel sympathy for the characters in the story? Why? or Why not?", and other similar questions (see Appendix E) proved to be effective in eliciting open ended responses. These type of questions succeeded in eliciting personal responses from learners and encouraged them to think beyond the texts to reflect on the realities of their own world. Feedback in the form of personal comments as well as probing questions for further clarification also played important roles in eliciting response from learners. According to cognitive process theorists Flower and Hayes (1994), feedback could turn the process of writing into a social, cultural and political act as the forces of the instructor, peers and the individual writer

compete, negotiate and collaborate. In this way, opinions and ideas were aired and debated upon and as a result, learners flourished and matured into viewing life from different lenses as they were actively engaged in the “learning process to blend language, experiences, ideas and understandings, to ‘get their voices out, and above all to think” (Cox & Zarillo, 1993, p.355).

Learners' Responses to Texts in Group Discussions

Dialogue journal writing, through a positive collaboration between the learners and me, presented a platform for the former to share their reactions to literary texts as well as the opportunity to clarify and extend their thinking in a dialogic process of writing, receiving feedback, revising, editing and rewriting. Learners then used their dialogue journals as a springboard or a starting point to help them actively participate in small group discussions. The findings reveal that having already reflected on their reading, learners are better prepared to discuss their ideas and make connections to others' ideas in the group. In this section, I will draw on some interesting excerpts from the conversations in group discussions and attempt to make sense of the various ways in which learners' understanding of literary texts is enhanced through the process of discussion.

Exploring Key Issues Together

During group discussions, learners endeavoured to collaborate with one another in an effort to promote a thoughtful discussion which affirms, challenges and extends each learner's understanding of the key issues in a text. The extract below shows learners exploring the issue of 'greed' in *The Necklace*.

Yasha: ... mustn't be so greedy in life... like Mathilde

I: Do you think everybody is greedy?

Yasha: Some people lah...

I: Don't you think there's a little bit of greed in all of us?

Li Hoon: I feel not all people greedy lah for money.

Ai Ling: Maybe for other things lah... materialistic lah.

Veni: Most of us are materialistic.

Ai Ling: But how much we are ... that's important.

Yasha: Ya... cannot be too much lah.

Ai Ling: Sometimes, when you greedy ah... it won't make you very happy... For me woman naturally always greedy.

Yasha: Not woman only, man also.

Li Hoon: They want ah... different things from woman but they also want things.

Veni: Like Loisel, he want his gun.

Li Hoon: But woman like to, to look nice every time.

Yasha: Men nothing to look nice.

Li Hoon: Every day wear seluar [trousers] and shirt only

Veni: Of course they not wear jewels!

Ai Ling: Then they look like a nut! (laughter)

Li Hoon: Woman also don't wear now... dangerous lah.

Ai Ling: Ya... a lot of snatch... ah ...

I: Snatch thieves.

Yasha: Ya... sometimes they curi [steal], then they come back... they so angry it's palsu [artificial].

I: So what have you learnt after reading this story?

Ai Ling: Sometimes, when you greedy ah... it won't make you very happy lah...

I: Okay, you all say you want to study very hard. Can you tell me why you want to study very hard?

Yasha: To have very good job.

Ai Ling: Very good job mean more money lah. (Laughter) ... Big car, big house, beautiful dress, a lot of jewel... (Laughter)

Yasha: No lah, not jewel.

Ai Ling: But big house, big car...

Yasha: Ya... (Laughter)

I: So you see, there's an element of greed in all of us, isn't it? Can anybody here say that they are not greedy at all? (All the learners shake their heads in negation.) Okay, then, do you still think that Mathilde deserved her punishment?

Yasha: Ya... she must be happy with what she have.

Ai Ling: Easy to say lah... You happy or not with what you have?

Yasha: Happy lah but want to change some things lah...

Ai Hoon: We cannot... ah... kehidupan [live] like parents lah...

Ai Ling: I think all of us ah... want a better life.

In this exchange, learners talk about their perceptions of greed and as they explore the topic collaboratively, they reflect and make sense of what it means to them personally. They also make connections to events and happenings around them such as the reference to snatch thieves. Through this process, learners learn not to make general sweeping statements without proof or thought. For instance, Yasha first makes a statement that one mustn't be so greedy in life ("...mustn't be so greedy in life...like Mathilde") but during the course of the discussion, she admits that she aspires to have a "very good job" and thus is gently mocked by Ai Ling for her hypocrisy ("Very good job mean more money lah...Big car, big house, beautiful dress, a lot of jewel...") until finally Yasha realizes that almost no one is exempt from greed.

Whilst discussing *The Drover's Wife*, the learners further explored an issue which some of them had delved into in their journals: the alternative choices the drover could have opted for instead of droving.

I: ... Do you think the drover likes to go droving, leaving his family behind?

Yasha: No, it's the work like that ... so he has to go.

Veni: He no choice.

Li Hoon: He can find another work ... he change the work lah.

Yasha: Cannot lah because they live in Australian bush, the place is so ah..

I: Isolated?

Yasha: Ah... and far away from town.

Veni: If they go to town, must pay rent...

Ai Ling: Maybe they can sell something.

Yasha: Sell what? Already they are poor.

Ai Ling: Sell food or drinks ah... Drinks they can make themselves
what...

Veni: How? They must need modal [capital] what...

Ai Ling: They can just work for... somebody first... after that they get
the modal and can open shop lah...

This excerpt shows evidence of a disciplined discourse among learners. The learners think in a logical and reasonable way and each learner's response is congruent to the argument presented before that. For example, when Li Hoon says that the drover "can find another work", Yasha inserts that this is not an option as "...they live in Australian bush...far away from town". Veni supports Yasha's argument by adding that "If they go to town, [they] must pay rent...". Ai Ling provides a solution, "Maybe they can sell something... food or drinks..." to which Veni rightfully inquires "How? They must need modal [capital]...". Ai Ling further elaborates on her idea by saying, "They can work for... somebody first...after that...they can open shop..." In this way, disciplined thought is nurtured as learners provide evidence or elaborate to reinforce what they have said.

Sharing Insights Through Multiple Perspectives

Discussions also help learners to view matters from different perspectives; in other words through the lenses of their peers. In this way, I feel learners become trained through discussions to relate better to works of literature. In their journals, learners voiced their confusions as to why Mathilde married Loisel in the *The Necklace*. This issue was introduced into the discussion and there was sharing of intense insight. I was surprised when Yasha made the connection between the class system in *The Necklace* to the caste system practiced in India and some other parts of the world where Indians reside.

I: In your journals, you all said that you don't know why Mathilde married Loisel.

Yasha: Maybe she compel by parents.

Veni: I think so.

Ai Ling: She no choice lah... tradition.

I: It's not tradition but it's more like a class system.

Yasha: Like in India lah.

Veni: Ya... woman from one class cannot marry man from other class.

Yasha: That day I read in newspaper... in India, one woman from... eh... low class, she run away marry man from high class.

I: What happened?

Yasha: That man's uncles, father, brothers all go to that woman's house, Tarik [pulled] all she sisters and mother to sawah [paddy field] and rape.

Li Hoon: Ai Yo [My goodness] teruknya [that's terrible]...Still got class
ah..

I: Yes, we call it the caste system.

Yasha: Here also got... when you want to marry ah... they ask you many
things one.

Veni: Low class no people want to marry.

Ai Ling: If me, I better not marry... Stay alone better lah... bukan
Terpaksa kahwin [not forced to get married] what...

Through interacting with each other, learners share insights and understandings and in this way remembered texts become shared texts thus building intertextuality among members of a discussion group. The discussion on *The Drover's Wife* also elicited thoughtful insights from learners. Whilst the other learners only saw the obvious and heaped praises on the drover's wife whilst condemning the drover, Veni managed to see what was beyond the surface.

Ai Ling: I just like the mother only... Maybe ah... her husband must try to
make their life better lah... drover lah...

Veni: But we read the drover's wife only, we never read the drover.
Don't know what he doing... maybe he also rasa sedih [feeling
sad] ah... rindu [missing] he family...he be drover to get
money not to enjoy...

Yasha: Ya ..eh...they never tell lah...

Veni: My father ...ah..he also don't like to go anywhere lah...ah..never
take my family.

Yasha: Ya, but drover must go lah... he no pilihan [no choice].

Ai Ling's declaration that she only likes the drover's wife and "...her husband [the drover] must try to make their life better..." is immediately countered by Veni who asserts that we only read about the drover's wife and not about the drover himself and that "... maybe he also *rasa sedih* [feeling sad]...*rindu*[missing] he family...he be drover to get money, not to enjoy...". Veni's eye-opening statement makes Yasha realize that the story is narrated from a single viewpoint, that of the drover's wife. This shows that discussions enable members of the group to view things from different perspectives. Langer (1995) posits that by being responsive to the various opinions put forward, individual interpretations may be shaped, reshaped and altered by others. This helps learners to develop as both readers as well as thinkers.

Making Intertextual Connections

During the discussions, learners also made intertextual connections between *The Necklace* and *The Drover's Wife*. Bloome (1993), proposes that merely juxtaposing texts is insufficient for intertextuality to be present. He maintains that the juxtaposition must be proposed, interactionally recognized, acknowledged and have social significance. This is the case in the excerpt below where Veni proposes that Mathilde and the drover's wife share similar qualities in that they are both conscientious women who live up to their responsibilities. In articulating this intertextual link, Veni makes it possible for the other learners to reflect and extend their thinking.

Yasha: I like the drover's wife because she happy with what she have not impian [dreaming] to have more.

Ai Ling: Mathilde also okay lah... before she lost necklace she not nice lah but after she lost she working very hard.

Li Hoon: I like drover's wife, she can take care of their childrens and not... not mengelakkan beban lah... [run away from her responsibilities]

I: Ah... she doesn't run away from her responsibilities.

Veni: But Mathilde also... she not run away from her responsibilities...

Yasha: Ya... em... when she lost necklace she not say, "No, no it's not me". She work hard, she pay back.

Veni: The two ladies responsible madam... they see the problem and not run away.

Yasha: Yes, they find way to selesaikan [solve it].

Li Hoon: Ya loh... two woman also very strong.

Ai Ling: We all woman... and in this world ah... we must always be stronglah kalau tidak habislah [otherwise we'll be doomed]. (agreement from all the learners)

When intertextual connections are articulated, new shared texts are constructed and this connects the learners in a collaborative context of meaning making. In addition, it also fosters positive social relationships amongst this small community of learners which further promotes and encourages the sharing of intertextual connections as well as expanding individual thoughts.

Facilitating Responses to Texts

Dialogue journal writing being interactive in nature enables learners to think more deeply about their reading as they have to discover and discuss certain ideas, concepts or claims and to explain them to their dialogue partner. It also provides a means for learners to grapple with the content of the subject without unduly worrying about grammatical, structural or spelling errors as well as various other distracting factors in the classroom.

Initially I was astonished at the amount of response in the learners' journals compared to the one or two word responses I usually get in class. Although the learners' language proficiency is average at best, their ideas come through quite clearly. Upon probing, the learners collectively agreed that it is easier to respond in writing due to various reasons. According to Veni, she is not brave enough to respond to my questions in class as she feels her English is not good enough and thus needs a longer time to formulate her answers. Yasha concurs and says that it would be embarrassing if her classmates were to laugh at her responses. Ai Ling says that in class, there is insufficient time for her to think and respond as compared to dialogue journal writing where she has ample time to write down her responses. The learners' reticence is explained by Krashen (1982), as the 'affective filter', which is an imaginary barrier. This barrier is lowered when the learner is relaxed and motivated thereby allowing input to become intake. However, the affective filter is automatically raised when the learner is self-conscious, stressed or unmotivated, thus making acquisition an impossibility. This suggests the importance of a classroom environment that allows learners the

luxury of time and space to ponder and share connections collaboratively instead of the present classroom situation where there is perpetual motion, one activity followed by another in an unspoken race where the finishing line is the completion of the prescribed syllabus.

Responding in dialogue journals and using the ideas in the journals as a springboard to fully participate in small group discussions completes the dialogic circle by bringing into focus fellow learners' voices as this gives each learner the opportunity to collaborate and co-construct meaning. This is important as each learner needs to hear what other learners think and in this way, knowledge is built on the layers of each learner's response. Ultimately, literary discussions gives learners opportunities to develop their own interpretations, challenge their initial understandings, raise questions and grow as critical thinkers and literate members of society. The key participants in this study perceived discussions as opportunities for them to discover other learners' thoughts and interpretations of the stories they all read. According to the learners, it was easier to talk about issues and concerns as they could refer to their journals for ideas to talk about. In fact from my observations, learners hardly ever referred to their journals throughout the discussions but their responses in the journals had prepared them to actively take part in the discussions as most of them were armed with ideas to talk about.

Being a participant as well as an observer of the literature discussions however, was not an easy task. Honestly believing in reader response principles, I knew that all my learners had something worthwhile to say. Thus, I allowed for

open responses and tried not to lead the learners to my own conclusions. Thus as a teacher, I had to do a balancing act by being a good listener and a keen observer of the discussion dynamics of the group in order to know when to remain quiet and not interfere and when to encourage learners to further develop their ideas.

Conclusion

In this study, I set out to gain insights into the use of dialogue journal writing to facilitate reader response in literature and to see how this played out in acting as a springboard to initiate small group discussions. In this chapter therefore, I have attempted to capture the various dimensions of learners' response through the interactive act of dialogue journal writing. In addition to this, the very act of participating in journal writing imbued learners with self confidence as evident in the depth of understanding and connections readers created when encouraged to develop a personal relationship with the text thus enabling them to be active participants in group discussions. In my concluding chapter, I will draw together the key findings that emerged in this study and discuss their implications for teaching literature in the ESL context.