



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICE ON MEANING-MAKING
IN THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE**

NORHERANI MONING

FPP 2007 28



DEDICATION

For those who are with me, Akak, Athira, Azim and Alyani and those who had left,
my mum and most beloved husband Amin



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia
in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND PRACTICE ON MEANING-MAKING
IN THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE**

By

NORHERANI MONING

June 2007

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The main purpose of the study was to examine teachers' beliefs and practice regarding meaning-making in the teaching of literature. The study was carried out through a detailed investigation of two research questions: (1) what are teachers' beliefs regarding meaning-making in the teaching of literary texts? (2) How do teachers make meaning accessible to students in a literature classroom? These questions were continuously addressed throughout the study with the specific concern of investigating teachers' beliefs in meaning-making, understanding the process of meaning-making in the teaching of literature and linking these concepts to actual classroom practice in the English language teaching classroom in the secondary schools in Malaysia.

A naturalistic qualitative inquiry was selected as the methodology of the study since it was deemed the most appropriate for a phenomenon of this nature. Data was gathered



and generated from eight teachers from two government schools. The participants were selected based on criterion reference purposive sampling. The data collection method to achieve the purpose of this study was in-depth interview, non-participant lesson observation and document review. Each interview lasted one to two hours, were recorded using digital audio recorder, transcribed verbatim, and analysed manually. In addition, a non-participant lesson observation of teachers' teaching the literature component was made available to the researcher by some of the participants. Documents in the form of teachers' lesson plans, syllabus and students' products were also analysed.

The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through member checks, peer examination, triangulation of data source and audit trail. The findings yielded nine beliefs regarding meaning making and three approaches employed by the participants in the literature classroom. The findings were further conceptualised to form a thematic portrayal of teachers' beliefs and practice. The study concludes by constructing a model of teachers' beliefs and practice in meaning-making which could enhance understanding of the phenomenon of meaning-making process in relation to teachers' beliefs and practice. Implications of the study focus on training of pre-service and in-service Teacher Education. Recommendations for further research were also suggested.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KEPERCAYAAN DAN AMALAN GURU TERHADAP PENGHASILAN
MAKNA DI DALAM PENGAJARAN SASTERA BAHASA INGGERIS**

Oleh

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Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji kepercayaan dan amalan guru terhadap fenomena penghasilan makna di dalam pengajaran komponen sastera Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian telah dijalankan berasaskan dua soalan: (1) apakah kepercayaan guru terhadap penghasilan makna di dalam pengajaran teks sastera Bahasa Inggeris? (2) bagaimanakah guru menolong murid terhadap penghasilan makna di dalam pengajaran sastera Bahasa Inggeris? Soalan kajian menjadi panduan untuk mengkaji fenomena penghasilan makna, kepercayaan guru dan kaitan terhadap praktis.

Pendekatan kualitatif telah digunakan sebagai pendekatan penyelidikan kerana di anggap paling sesuai dengan soalan, tujuan kajian dan fenomena yang dikaji. Data telah dikumpul dan dijanakan dari lapan orang guru yang bertugas di dua buah sekolah kerajaan. Peserta telah dipilih melalui proses persampelan purpasif berkriteria. Peserta



telah ditemubual selama satu hingga dua jam. Temubual dengan peserta telah direkod menggunakan rekoder digital, transkripsi secara verbatim dijalankan dan dianalisis secara manual.

Selain dari itu, data juga didapati dari pemerhatian pengajaran guru di dalam kelas dan dokumen rasmi yang merupakan buku rekod guru, sukatan pelajaran dan hasil kerja murid. Kebolehpercayaan kajian yang merupakan semakan peserta, pemeriksaan rakan penyelidikan dan laluan audit telah diawasi sepanjang kajian. Keputusan analisa mendapati sembilan kepercayaan guru yang membentuk penghasilan makna di kalangan peserta.

Dapatan menunjukkan tiga pendekatan yang diamalkan oleh guru bagi membina penghasilan makna semasa pengajaran komponen sastera Bahasa Inggeris di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris. Satu pengkonsepsualan tema telah dihasilkan melalui kesemua dapatan. Satu model kepercayaan dan praktis guru juga telah dihasilkan yang bertujuan menjadi sebagai satu templat untuk sistem kepercayaan guru mengenai penghasilan makna. Implikasi untuk bahagian latihan guru iaitu pra-latihan dan dalam latihan telah dibincangkan. Cadangan untuk kajian seterusnya juga telah diajukan.

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I certify that the Examination Committee has met on 11th June 2007 to conduct the final examination of Norherani Moning on her Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “Teachers’ Beliefs and Practice Regarding Meaning-Making in the Teaching of Literature” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulation 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.

NORHERANI MONING

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BAK	Beliefs, Assumptions and Knowledge
CDC	Curriculum Development Centre
CRP	Class Reader Programme
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELO	English Language Officer
ELRP	English Language Reading Programme
ELT	English Language Teaching
EPRD	Education Planning & Research Division
ESL	English as Second Language
HEP	High English Proficiency
KBSM	New Integrated Secondary School Curriculum
KL	Kuala Lumpur
LO	Lesson Observation
MCE	Malaysian Certificate of Examination
MOE	Ministry of Education
NUDist	Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching and Theorizing
PMR	Lower Certificate of Education
Q&A	Question and Answer
SES	Social Economic Status
SK	Primary school
SM	Secondary School
SMK	Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan



SPM	Malaysian Certificate of Education
STPM	Higher Certificate of Education
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TLD	Transactional Literary Discourse
TORP	Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile
USM	Universiti Science Malaysia
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development



CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The ultimate purpose of learning and teaching is for meaning (Brooks, 2004). This is the basic objective of lessons which cut across all curricula and disciplines. Educators and teachers alike strive for meaningful lessons. Teaching for meaning, preparing students for the real world beyond school is advocated by all theories be it traditionalist, humanist or constructivist. It is uncontested and emphasised at all levels. Research on learning and cognition shows that learning for meaning leads to greater retention and use of information and ideas (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2000). The process of meaning-making occurs when learners achieve not just an understanding of what has been taught but a deeper revelation of what is being studied (Brooks, 2004). This occurs when students are able to “link new information to prior knowledge, relate facts to big ideas, explore essential questions and apply their learning in new context” (McTighe, Seif, and Wiggins, 2004: 26). Learners’ meaning-making is a complex and cognitive process which occurs within the individual.

Reading is meaning-making. This happens when one reads to understand and make sense of a certain text (Smith, 1992; Nuttal, 1996). Reading is also a phenomenon that is non-receptive involving the reader as an active participant. In recent years reading has also been described as an interactive process (Carrell, Devine and Eskey, 1988). This term could be construed in two ways: one, when the reader attempts to make sense of the text, the reader is in an active state of mind, which Goodman



(1970) terms as the ‘psycholinguistic guessing game’; the other, when the reader merges information from the text with the knowledge the reader has within him (Hedge, 2002). From this viewpoint, reading can be seen as a dialogue between the reader and the text or the reader and the author (Widdowson, 1979a).

However, reading literary texts requires more demands on the reader than reading non-literary texts because of various elements within the literary text (Miall and Kuiken, 1998; Parkinson and Thomas, 2000). The reader not only has to deal with the language and all its arbitrariness but also the literary devices, sociological aspects and cultural aspects. When one reads a literary text, one is challenged with knowledge of the language, social and historical aspects, cultural codes and textual and intertextual aspects. Readers have to use their schemata and worldview to understand the meaning. Thus, the Structuralist perceived that reading literature has become a science (Bressler 1992). It becomes a process that needs an analytical and interpretative mind to comprehend a text. It is this phenomenon that has been debated upon for decades by theorists and literary critics, not how the reading of literature is supposedly carried out and the methodology or how meaning could be derived or constructed from a literary piece.

Studies in literary understanding have been a continuous endeavour to the theorists. This is due to the rapid change in the theoretical bearings which have directly shifted the focus in classroom pedagogies and approaches. An eight-year study (1990-1998) in the teaching and learning of literature by the American National Research Centre on Literature Teaching and Learning has enlightened researchers on how readers understand literary texts. It gives guidelines to educators to help their readers to



achieve meanings in their reading of texts (Langer, 1998). Langer (1998) reported that reading in a literary manner is described as “exploring the horizons of possibilities” because of the mental explorations that happened during the reading process (1998: 12). According to Langer (1994), readers seek for the “real and hidden” story and construct views as a way to explore ideas. Studies in this project show that readers approach the text first by understanding its overall meaning. The second approach is by getting the detailed meanings of the text. The two approaches continually develop as the reading begins. Readers change their orientations of both approaches as they enhance their understandings (Langer, 1998). This awareness of readers changing orientations has helped educators in helping readers. They seize the opportunity to probe and provoke readers in deepening and exploring possibilities of meaning to augment their understanding by using the right questions and techniques.

The present study aims to comprehend this process of reading from another perspective, that is, from the viewpoint of the teachers teaching literary texts. The question is: how do they view this transaction between reader and text, and are the same beliefs manifested in their practice in the ESL classrooms?

Teaching of Literature in English in Malaysia

The inception of the literature component in the KBSM 2000 syllabus marked the formal acceptance of literature in the school mainstream in Malaysia. English Literature has been moving in and out of the school curriculum owing to the changes in the school system which follows the aspirations of the Ministry of Education (MOE). English Literature used to have a major part in English Language teaching in the country after Independence as a result of a British Colonial past, declined in the

1980s and now in the twenty-first century has made a comeback to the school syllabus (Subramaniam, 2003). When English literature, as it was called then, was taught in Malaysian secondary schools, it was for the purpose of studying literature. English literature was taught as a subject both at the primary and secondary school levels. The texts selected for primary school students were abridged versions and were not tested, whereas at the secondary school level, English literature was tested for those students who had registered for the English literature paper in the Senior Cambridge or the Malaysian Certificate of Examination (MCE) examination (Vethamani, 2004). It is interesting to note that English Literature as it was referred to before is now termed as literature in English as a result of the diverse developments in the international literary scene (Vethamani, 2004).

Subsequently, the downturn of the teaching of literature became evident when the medium of instruction was changed from the English language to the National language (Bahasa Malaysia) under the Language Act 1967 after the government consigned English as the second language from its previous status of an alternate official language. English remained as the medium of instruction in the secondary school until 1979. The language conversion programme was completed in 1980 at the Form five level. Nevertheless, the language conversion programme has affected the amount and quality of English used within the classroom (Talif, 1995). This is due to the fact that English is only taught as a subject five times a week. The change in the medium of instruction is often associated with the declining role and importance of the English language in education, and inevitably, a drastic drop in students taking literature in English paper was evident. This contributed to the

decline in the standard of English amongst Malaysian students. Inevitably, this change had an impact on the fate of literature in English in the curriculum.

The teaching of literature in English has its role to play as part of various programmes to help improve the standard of English in the country. For most part, the teaching of literature in the Malaysian primary schools was in the form of extensive reading programmes, for example the New Zealand Readers programme (1970s), the World Bank reading project (1980s), the NILAM programme (1998), and now the Contemporary Reading programme. These programmes were aimed at promoting reading habit amongst students, enabling students to become independent readers, developing reading skills for different purposes, promoting language attainment, and developing effective and competent readers (Subramaniam, 2003).

For the secondary school level, extensive reading programmes then were in the form of the English Language Reading Programme (ELRP) introduced in residential schools and later to day schools in the 1970s and 80s and were soon replaced by the Class Reader Programme (CRP) in 1990. However, both programmes have different functions and purposes. The ELRP was aimed at improving the standard of reading stipulated in the syllabus. Among the many objectives of the CRP as stated in the New Integrated Secondary School Curriculum (KBSM) in 1993 were to: (1) expose learners to materials written in English, (2) motivate learners to read and inculcate in them the reading habit, (3) help learners increase their language proficiency through teaching materials that can enrich and consolidate learning, and (4) generate interest in students and prepare them for the study of literature.

The CRP brought about some changes in the teaching of literature in the English language programme, unequivocally affecting the teaching of literature in English which included a forty minute lesson allocated for the component in the school mainstream. With reference to the main objectives, the CRP not only aimed at improving reading skills and habits, but also at introducing literature and language teaching. This change in the English language programme was welcomed by most educationists in TESL with regard to the growing use of literature in language programmes abroad (Brumfit, 1985; Collie and Slater, 1987; McRae and Vethamani, 1999).

The CRP was noted as an attempt by the Ministry to use literature as a resource in the ESL classroom (Mukundan, Ting S.H., and Ali Abdul Ghani, 1998). A lot of effort was put forth by the MOE to make this programme a success. It involved training teachers to teach literature texts, recruiting a pool of experienced teachers to write teaching files and publishing them to help English teachers in their work.

However, the CRP programme fizzled out of the mainstream due to the lack of use by teachers (Mukundan, Ting S.H. and Ali Abdul Ghani, 1998). Among the many reasons given were students' attitudes towards reading the text, uninteresting texts, mismatch between texts and students' level of proficiency, teachers' attitude and interest, time and teachers' inadequacy in subject and pedagogical knowledge. The other reasons offered were the component was not tested in the public examination and the lack of monitoring of this programme at the school level (Vethamani, 2004).

It is not surprising to note that there has been a major decline in the teaching and learning of literature in English in the country over the years even though it used to be a relatively popular subject among English medium students in the 1960s and early 1970s (Talif, 1995). One of the reasons of the decline is the role played by the policy makers in reducing or excluding the literature components at early and intermediate level with the intention of achieving linguistic proficiency (Talif, 1995). The KBSR, or the Integrated Curriculum for Primary School (1983), was aimed at achieving this target. Literature in English at upper secondary school level still remains an elective subject and is mostly studied for examination purposes. However, students who registered for this paper were students with exceptionally good mastery in the English language and commonly so among elite urban schools. The significantly small number of students taking literature in English as an elective was a major concern among educators and the Ministry of Education (Vethamani, 1993).

In 1999 a literature component was injected into the teaching and learning of literature in English in the secondary school English syllabus. This implementation began in year 2000. It involved the allocation of a period in the English timetable in a week and for the component to be examined in the PMR (Lower Certificate of Education) and SPM (Malaysian Certificate of Education). The purpose of this implementation is now teaching literature in English for study purposes. The inclusion of this component is basically to improve the level of English proficiency among the students (CDC, 2000). Its other aims were to promote cross cultural awareness and create sensitivity towards other people and cultures (CDC, 2000).

The syllabus clearly states that:

