

Reinventing the Mode of Teaching: Question as a way of learning



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ABSTRACT

In the present times, when teaching has become equivalent to mentoring and learning process has acquired a new approach, it is imperative that the learners are put at the centre and their potential is exploited to the maximum by making them actively involved in the classroom. It is time to reverse the trend (especially in a post-graduate class of students of literature), wherein instead of asking answers to questions, the emphasis should be on to encourage them to pose questions. The paper shares thoughts towards the concept that questioning is a mode of learning, questioning encourages learners' creativity and questioning is a way of sharing unanswered answers. It is based on the hypothesis that questions help to raise issues and given a proper learning environment, a person can improve his/her ability if he/she is allowed to express, think and articulate. The paper also focuses on the advantages such learning can provide in the days ahead.

Keywords: *learner, questioning, learning process*

Classroom is a place of interaction and collaboration between learners and the teacher. Unfortunately, literary studies is losing its charm but if these studies can make the students more skill oriented, then the crisis which is facing the field of Arts can easily be tackled. As a practicing teacher the questions which generally crop up in mind are: Are our learners creative enough to prepare the future generations? Are we able to inspire the students to think out of the box? These questions embody

predicament of the present time but in the problem lies the solution. Only what we need to do is to just let go off the existing norms and make way for something new. There are five main things which can be done to make the learning process interesting and make inquiry a classroom strategy.

Incorporating questioning as a technique in the classroom

Reversing the trend by letting the learners ask questions

- %o Letting them discuss in pairs the main theme and brainstorm the ideas
- %o Encouraging the learners to list down important topic sentences from the text which garners attention and then turn it into a query
- %o Promoting a debate on the questions raised
- %o Inspiring them to focus on less discussed issues from the text or to chalk out events from the text which they think are important

It is based on the hypothesis that questions help to raise issues and given a proper learning environment, a person can improve his/her ability if he/she is allowed to express, think and articulate. Right from the school days the learners are only used to answer the questions but when they are made to perform a role opposite to their expectation, it is noticed that they start thinking with a desire.

Literature Review

As we look into inquiry as a classroom strategy we find that there is a mention of three contemporary approaches to collaborative, inquiry-based teaching, namely Matthew Lipman's 'Community of Inquiry', Leonard Nelson's 'Socratic Dialogue', and David Bohm's 'Dialogue'. "With information becoming more accessible, what is required is the disposition and capacity to think reflectively in order to process the increasing amount of information available." (Chesters 4) Cam

has said that

"If only people were better at asking appropriate questions, articulating problems and issues...evaluating the alternatives open to them, engaging in discussion with one another, and thinking collaboratively, then we would all be so much better off." (Cam, 2006, p.2)

It was in 4th century BC that questioning was first used as an instructional tool, when Socrates used questions and answers to challenge assumptions.

Bartlett Giamatti (1976:194) says, "Teaching is an instinctual art, mindful of potential, craving of realization." According to Gardner (1995), it is the progress toward truth that "is vital to the practice of inquiry ... at least if such progress is possible" (p.38). Pardales and Girod (2006) refer to the process as people coming together to serve as a "jury to ideas and hypotheses" (p.301).

For Burgh, Field and Freakly, the purpose of democratic education is that of reconstruction (Burgh, 2003; Burgh, Field & Freakley, 2006). The substantive dimension is the "subject matter, the content, things worth inquiring about" (Burgh et al, 2006, p.138). The aim of inquiry according to Lipman is to help learners' "become more thoughtful, more reflective, more considerate, more reasonable individuals" (1977, p.69- 70).

Gilbert Ryle (1971) argues that creativity is present when we ponder because we must act as the teacher, helping our ideas to form."It is also through the process of

actively “interrogating” the content using provocative questions that students strengthen and deepen their understanding.” (McTighe 5) Coming to know something requires learners to actively participate as they construct and progressively improve their understanding through the exploration of ideas (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000).

The power of QtA is that students do all the interpretive work: “They construct the meaning, wrestle with the ideas, and consider the ways information connects to construct meaning” (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kugan, 1977, p. 33) Rothstein and Santana have called their method of teaching the Question Formulation Technique. Learners’ questions may be triggered by unknown words which then engender cognitive dissonance (Festinger) The act of ‘composing questions’ focuses the attention of students on content, main ideas, and checking if content is understood (Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman 1996). In the book *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions* (2011), Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana propose six-step process for teaching students to formulate their own questions and take ownership of their learning.

Questioning as a Strategy

Thus based on the review of the research and its findings, it is apt to say that questioning, inquiry on the part of the learner can contribute a lot towards their learning process and outcome. This technique can be adopted as a strategy and

it can be used:

- % To encourage people to develop independent thinking
- % To promote generative thinking, critical thinking & evaluative thinking thereby leading to connectivity.
- % To stimulate not just thinking but reconstructing.
- % To enable a better understanding of the text by letting the learners’ adopt ideas, conjectures and hypothesis.
- % To develop in them a confidence to think creatively and innovatively.
- % To increase student engagement and promote independent thinking.
- % To make learners’ aware of the fact that content is important, but as a means to an end, not as an end in itself.
- % To examine and assess what has been learned, and check that what has been learnt is understood.
- % To generate views and opinions of learners.
- % To develop the cognitive ability in the learners wherein they are able to analyze, speculate, put forth an argument and thereby negotiate.

In an age when students are trying to avoid reading the original text and rely more on ‘books about books’ or are hooked to the Spark Notes or e notes, this technique can work wonders. Post graduate students are well versed with basic subject knowledge so

after dealing with the text with content specific approach, the practice of reversing the trend can lead to discussion. Inquiry on the part of the learners' can help them to appreciate the deep underlying principles of thought.

Steps to progress through questioning strategy

The learner can be made to progress through questioning in the following manner:

1. Identify the text to be selected after the content has been explained.
2. Give them the areas / points where students can explore further and brainstorm ideas.
3. Ask them to inquire and pose questions.
4. The teacher can even cite a few examples of the way in which questions can be raised. Even specific words, quotes from

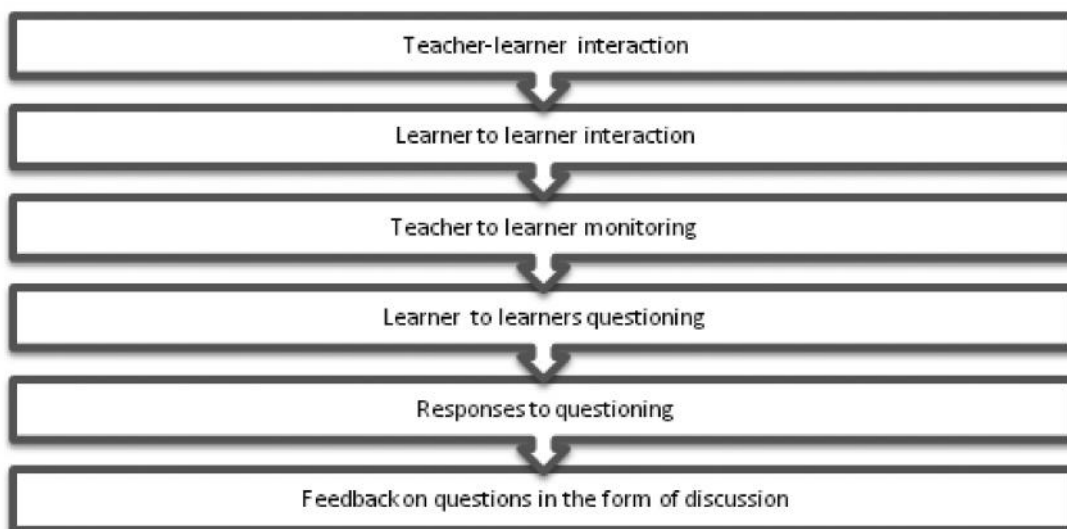
the text can be selected for further exploration.

5. Use “think- alouds” to model for students how to think through the questions. (Corley)
6. Award the best question

We can outline at least five facts which can help in creating stimulating environment:

- % Content-catered plan
- % Thought development and enhancement of knowledge
- % Innovation towards dialogic approach in classroom
- % Thorough home work in locating specific points to help learners collaborate and create
- % Catering to multiple intelligences and diverse interests

This questioning technique can be represented in the form of a diagram:



However this cannot happen in the absence of motivation within and it also needs a stimulating environment. The aim is to challenge the average performers and mould them into bright performers and it also enhances the bright learners' innate capacity towards a higher level of understanding.

Because of the interactive nature of questions, the classroom can become a centre for exploration of ideas. Questioning by learners is on the part of the teacher a kind of feedback .They start thinking like a

teacher and not just the strategy but their role also gets reversed. Terry Heick in the article "7 strategies to help students ask great questions" states:

"In education, we tend to value a student's ability to answer our questions. But what might be more important is their ability to ask their own great questions—and more critically, their willingness to do so."

In the past three decades the teachers' role has changed and so has the learning styles. The shift in paradigm could be seen as:

Change From	Change To
Learning from books	Learning more from media,books and online information
Learning passively	Learning actively
Learning as product	Learning as process
Learning as a set of rigid rules to be grasped	Learning as a flexible process to be enjoyed
Learning to learn	Learning to unlearn

This sort of learning promotes 'community of inquiry' and in a general sense 'risk-taking culture'. To be able to progress one does not just need a data in the form of memory but should also be able to develop analytical skills. For the post graduate students of English Literature this mode of questioning can lead to an in depth study of human relations. They can put to test their own experience and raise questions which can further lead to questions. For instance if one is teaching the essays of Emerson, the questions posed by the learners can in reality lead to a greater discussion on the problems, challenges of

life and the way to cope with it.

Reverse trend from asking questions to the learner to let the learner pose questions can go a long way in enhancing the learning process, knowledge and scholarship. It can:

- % Lead to comprehensive possibility of interrogation to oneself leading to cross communication
- % Increase the possibility of learners' enhancement of summarizing skills
- % Highlight the important concepts and facts of the text

- % Stimulate the learning of vocabulary
- % Encourage the reading habit
- % Help understand the strengths and weaknesses by comparison and contrast

Since by its very nature, question seeks answers and it indirectly promotes a culture of communication. Starr Stackstein, a teacher, states:

“Empowering learners with the control of the questions, puts them in the driver’s seat of their journey and progress. They follow their interests and we trust them to develop more questions as they go, unraveling the possibilities in their learning...”

Conclusion

Thus learning to question and questioning to learn almost go parallel. It is like we as teachers are giving them a chance to engage them with their feelings. Abelard Peter’s remark goes well with the significance of questioning: “The key to wisdom is this - constant and frequent questioning, for by doubting we are led to question and by questioning we arrive at the truth.” Let the young minds with their curiosity reverberate a creative environment .Instead of asserting our thinking it is time now to help them in reconstruction. In order to create a creative generation we have to let the learners invest in their thoughts today.

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