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ABSTRACT

Teachers need to be able to ask quality questions in the teaching of reading--questions to assess student comprehension and to clarify content, questions to enable learners to engage in higher levels of cognition such as creative and critical thinking, questions to help students engage in meaningful reading experiences and become lifelong learners, and questions to diagnose and remediate student reading difficulties. In reading expository materials, students should be helped to differentiate facts from opinions. A kind of developmental question in reading for teachers to raise is to have students detect persuasive language. Another type of question for teachers to raise is to have students draw a conclusion. Students need to learn to detect "bandwagon" approaches in reading advertisements. They also must learn to use relevant information in problem solving. Students need to experience locating the author's purpose in writing. Teachers must ask questions to evaluate student achievement and to help students focus attention on new words being presented for reading. Students need to raise important questions to learn from diverse sources of subject matter, in formal as well as informal settings. (NKA)

Improving Teacher Questions in Reading Instruction.

by Marlow Ediger

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IMPROVING TEACHER QUESTIONS IN READING INSTRUCTION

There are a plethora of reasons why teachers need to be able to ask high quality questions in the teaching of reading. Among the many reasons, the following are salient:

- 1. questions raised need to assess pupil comprehension of what has been read in an ongoing lesson.**
- 2. questions raised need to stimulate interest in reading.**
- 3. questions raised need to enable learners to engage in higher levels of cognition such as critical and creative thinking, as well as problem solving.**
- 4. questions raised need to assist pupils to perceive purpose or reasons for reading a given selection.**
- 5. questions raised need to provide for optimal achievement levels in reading instruction.**
- 6. questions raised need to help pupils clarify content read (See Emery, 1992).**
- 7. questions raised in reading instruction need to encourage pupils to become life long learners.**
- 8. questions raised need to help pupils engage in meaningful reading experiences.**
- 9. questions raised in reading need to guide pupils to perceive content as being holistic and related, not in terms of isolated ideas.**
- 10. questions raised need to diagnose and remediate pupil difficulties in reading (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Six).**

How might the above enumerated broad objectives be achieved by pupils in ongoing lessons in reading? Which specific kinds of questions might then be asked of pupils in reading instruction?

Specific Questions to Ask Learners in Reading

Pupils do need to clearly differentiate facts from opinions. When reading expository materials in reading, pupils might well be assisted in making the differentiation. For example, a date given for the establishment of Jamestown Colony in the New World is 1607. This date, if factual, can be verified by using another or several reputable reference sources. The factual statement may be written on the chalkboard. In contrast, the teacher may say, "In my opinion, all the colonists who came in 1607 were brave individuals." Learners may then discuss how the colonists felt as they came to and settled in the New World. Pupils may then notice likenesses and differences of ideas

presented here. With adequate background information, there will tend to not be agreements on how the settlers felt as they came to and settled in the New World. Being able to separate facts from opinions will involve sequential growth of skills on the part of pupils. For example, on the kindergarten and first grade levels, pupils will agree on the number of learners in their classroom. This can be verified with repeated counting by different pupils. If asked which kind of food is liked best, there, of course will be variation in responses. Attempts to verify the one favorite food by all classmates is impossible and therefore represents an opinion.

A second kind of developmental question in reading for teachers to raise is to have pupils detect persuasive language. A good current events program, for example, will emphasize reading the Letters to the Editor section of a newspaper. The Letters will tend to emphasize persuading others to follow a certain line of thinking. Thus, a writer of a letter may emphasize that environmental laws are too strict and more land needs to be developed for oil drilling purposes such as in the Arctic Wild Life area. In response, a writer to the Letters to the Editor may attempt to persuade people of the need for more land being devoted to wild life and conservation purposes. A democracy tends to stress the importance of people debating the pros and cons of an issue. Perhaps, the issue of economic development versus conservation of the natural environment might be compared with the textbook author's purpose or goals.

Third, an important kind of question for teachers to raise of pupils is to have the latter draw a conclusion. With a discussion of the pros and cons of conserving the natural environment versus business concerns, as well as, Letters to the Editor, and the author's textbook perspective, pupils may be guided to develop a conclusion of the issue. The conclusion will summarize the major ideas presented during the discussion. Pupils need to be asked if they see any weaknesses in the ongoing as well as in the developed conclusion (Ediger, 2002, 16-19). The following questions are important to ask:

1. what is not in the conclusion which is valuable to include?
2. have too many things been put into the conclusion to make it too lengthy rather than to summarize main points?
3. what should then be taken out, if it is too lengthy?

Fourth, pupil need to detect bandwagon approaches in advertising. Selected ads may state that everyone uses shaving cream number one, which is then identified by name. The feeling may result in that the hearer feels he should also use shaving

cream number one. It is good for pupils to bring advertisements to class and these may then be analyzed to notice if and how bandwagon approaches are being used. Questions to ask pertaining to pupil collected advertisements from the printed media are the following:

1. what products are being advertised?
2. what is being said about each product?
3. what approaches are being used to influence buying of the one product as compared to the others?
4. which product named appeals to you most, if any, and why?
5. what would you recommend to make the for sale product even more appealing to customers? (Ediger, 1998, 74-77)

Fifth, pupils need to use relevant information in problem solving. Ideally, pupils with teacher guidance should identify the problem in a contextual situation. Clarity in problem statement is important. Thus, a meaningful problem is chosen for solving. The next flexible step is to have pupils locate data sources to use in solving the problem. The information gleaned needs to be relevant and pinpoint solutions to the identified problem. Critical thinking is necessary to separate the relevant from the non relevant. Needed information to solve the problem becomes an hypothesis and is subject to evaluation in a life like situation. If the evaluation upholds the tentative hypothesis, well and good. If not, a new hypothesis needs to be selected as a tentative answer to the problem. Again the hypothesis is tested in a life like situation and remains as is, unless evidence warrants this not to be the case. Stated hypotheses are always viewed as tentative and to be evaluated contextually (Ediger, 1996, 145-161).

Sixth, pupils need to experience locating the author's purpose(s) in writing. What are the author's reasons for writing? These reasons are purposes for writing. The author may wish to inform or present information to readers. Additional purposes are the following:

1. to present biased information which leads pupils to a single point of view. The teacher's task then is to guide pupils to perceive other perspectives and points of view.
2. to propagandize an idea or set of ideas. To do this, a writer will repeat in highly favorable terms a line of thinking. Generally, propaganda is perceived as being highly negative in a democracy. Companies, corporations, religious organizations, and governments may use propaganda to promote their cause or causes. The New Right, the conservative Christian movement,

and the Aryan Nations white supremacy groups, certainly do have their agendas of indoctrination. Pupils, when ready, need to be able to detect indoctrination efforts and analyze the efforts to impose these efforts. In a democracy, it is important to think critically pertaining to ideas in propaganda efforts.

Seventh, quality questions need to be asked to evaluate pupil achievement. This is an informal means of assessing learner achievement. In a discussion group, the teacher may ask a plethora of good questions to assess learner progress. For example, a teacher might ask questions such as the following pertaining to a literary selection read by pupils:

1. what can you say about the main character(s) in the story?
2. where did the story take place? How does the setting relate to the main character(s)?
3. who is telling the story? What is the theme of the story teller?
4. what happened in the story? Was the plot different than what you thought might happen?
5. was there irony in the story. The concept of irony might well need to be explained here (Ediger, 2001, Chapter Seven).

Eighth, the teacher needs to raise questions to help pupils focus attention upon the new words being presented for reading. Pupils benefit much when they see new words on the chalkboard or computer monitor prior to reading a new selection. The teacher needs to help pupils view each new word carefully so that they will be identified correctly in silent and oral reading. There are teachers who write the new words within a sentence so that pupils may identify them in context. Questions raised by the teacher to notice if the presented new words can be identified correctly, as these are being practiced in word recognition from the chalkboard, might well include learners giving a meaningful definition of each. The definition for each new word must be correct, contextually, in subject matter read. This will assist pupils to understand subject matter sequentially in reading. If definitions are difficult or nearly impossible to give, pupils may use each in a sentence. Related to word recognition and meaning attached, the teacher also needs to guide pupils to ask questions covering content to be read so that a purpose or reason is there for reading the selection. Questioning skills need to be developed within pupils. It is salient for each person to be able to ask quality questions so that curiosity is an end result (Ediger, 1993, 17-20).

Ninth, guest speakers need to be invited into the classroom

to enrich an ongoing lesson or unit being taught. They need to have specialized information to share with pupils in the classroom. The community is then brought into the local educational setting whereby school and society are integrated, not separate societies. With adequate background information, pupils should possess curiosity and ask relevant questions of each speaker.

Speakers with skills and knowledge pertaining to the following may be brought into the classroom (Parker, 2001):

1. persons with special skills: weavers, potters, jewelry makers
2. exchange students
3. persons with interesting hobbies
4. members of the local historical society
5. newspaper reporters, editors and staff writers
6. members of service organizations
7. county agents
8. representatives of environmental and conservation groups
9. 4H and other club leaders
10. early inhabitants of the community
11. professional persons: doctor, lawyer, software developer
12. members of the local business community: bankers, shop owners
13. union officials
14. representatives of local industries (docks, timber, manufacturing)
15. travel agents (think of them as “applied geographers”)
16. recent immigrants or other newcomers in the community
17. artists who work on public murals or public sculptures
18. commercial pilots (more “applied geographers!”)
19. community helpers: firefighters, police officers, librarians
20. government officials representing the three branches...

It is vital that teachers and pupils be able to ask relevant questions in the classroom setting so that the latter become curious and interested in learning to seek answers.

Pupils do need to raise important questions in order to learn from diverse sources of subject matter, in formal as well as informal settings. Pupils might then become increasingly proficient in

- * informing in providing information to others
- * connecting the self with the text, or putting the self into the shoes of others.

- * raising questions, speculating, and pondering.
- * positing hypotheses and possible answers.
- * interpreting by making sense of what has been read.
- * recalling information.
- * judging the worth, merit, and accuracy of content and actions (See Roser and Keehn, 2002).

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