

The Power of a Question

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The teachers' lounge was perpetually filled with discourse, ranging from the price of gold and refrigerators to mother-in-law anecdotes and the incessant debates regarding students. I often pondered, "Is this truly a school? We were meant to be educators, not adjudicators of students' personal lives."

However, on that particular day, I resolved to defy convention. I retrieved my phone and inquired of my seasoned colleagues: "How do you address students' profanity? How do you manage classroom disruptions? How do you interact with obstinate students?"

As I awaited their responses, a gentle nudge grazed my side. The school's amiable religious studies teacher, with a faint smile, advised, "Refrain from posing such questions. They will perceive you as inept in classroom management!" It was at that moment that I comprehended, in this society, inquiry is equated with incompetence, not intellectual growth.

Undaunted, I proceeded. The following week, I was scheduled to teach a lesson on the Seljuk dynasty. However, I entered the classroom with a distinct approach. I recognized that genuine learning transpires when students are immersed in the narrative, rather than passively listening. I drew a map on the blackboard; the Roman army advanced from one flank, while Alp Arslan, with his diminutive forces, confronted an adversary of significantly greater magnitude.

Addressing the class, I posed, "Envision yourselves in his position. A formidable, superior, and well-equipped adversary stands before you. What course of action do you pursue?"

Their eyes widened in astonishment. Silence permeated the room. No one dared to respond.

However, the narrative continued: Instead of making a hasty decision, Alp Arslan sought counsel from his vizier, Nizam al-Mulk. They deliberated on various strategies. Ultimately, he not only averted defeat but also captured the Roman army's commander.

The classroom erupted in excitement. The students cheered exuberantly, and pencil cases were launched into the air. They seemed to be participants in the battle. However, at the zenith of their exhilaration, I posed the pivotal question:

"Had Alp Arslan refrained from seeking counsel due to fear of ridicule, what would have transpired? Had he solely relied on his pride and presumed omniscience, could he have achieved victory?"

A profound silence descended upon the class. Index fingers gradually ascended from the desks. The audacity to inquire incrementally manifested in their gazes.

I addressed them, "What questions linger in your minds, questions you have never dared to ask? Which queries have remained dormant in the recesses of your minds, solely due to the apprehension of others' judgment?"

A momentary pause ensued, followed by the ascent of the first hand, then the second, the third... and discourse blossomed. Silence yielded to inquiries brimming with curiosity. I smiled inwardly.

"Alp Arslan was a potent monarch, yet he sought counsel and posed questions during critical junctures. Why should I, a humble teacher in a modest town, refrain?"

In the words of the book "The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse": "What was the bravest thing you ever said?" "Help."

The Power of Inquiry in Education: From Fear of Judgment to the Courage to Learn

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Introduction

In traditional educational systems, teachers are often perceived as omniscient figures, expected to exhibit no weaknesses or gaps in knowledge. This perspective not only stifles the dynamism and growth of the educational environment but also fosters a culture where inquiry is equated with incompetence and ignorance. The recounted experience exemplifies this challenge, where a teacher, upon posing questions about classroom management, encounters resistance from colleagues, yet subsequently imparts the value of inquiry to their students. This paper undertakes a scholarly analysis of this experience, drawing upon the perspectives of the sociology of education, the psychology of learning, classroom management, and teacher professional development.

Discussion

1.Sociological Analysis

The Cultural Structure of Education and the Role of the TeacherIn numerous educational settings, schools function as hierarchical institutions wherein teachers are expected to be infallible. This mindset cultivates an environment where teachers, fearing judgment, are less inclined to engage in learning and interaction. The anecdote of a teacher questioning colleagues about classroom management, only to be met with negative responses, illustrates this cultural structure. Conversely, progressive educational systems view teachers as lifelong learners, perpetually seeking growth.

2. Psychological Analysis

The Impact of Fear of Judgment on Learning The “bystander effect” in social psychology elucidates how individuals in group settings are less likely to take risks due to the fear of others’ judgment. In the recounted experience, this fear deterred teachers from posing questions aimed at improving their instructional practices. However, when the same teacher fostered a safe space for inquiry in the classroom, students were emboldened to articulate their questions. This aligns with the theory of “cognitive offloading,” as expressing questions alleviates cognitive processing load, facilitating deeper learning.

3. Analysis from a Classroom Management Perspective

The Role of Storytelling in Learning Storytelling is a highly effective pedagogical technique that enhances students’ cognitive and emotional engagement. In this anecdote, the teacher transformed historical information into a meaningful learning experience by narrating the Battle of Manzikert and employing maps and mental imagery. This approach resonates with Mayer’s multimedia learning theory, which underscores the significance of integrating text, visuals, and interaction in learning.

4. Analysis Based on Learning Theories

Constructivism: Learning transpires through active engagement. The teacher’s question, “If you were Alp Arslan, what would you do?” prompted students to practice critical thinking and problem-solving.

Bandura’s Social Learning Theory: This theory posits that observing others’ behavior influences an individual’s decisions. In this narrative, students, witnessing their teacher’s inquiry, were encouraged to pose their own questions.

5. Analysis from the Perspective of Teacher Professional Development

The Role of Reflective Practice According to Donald Schön’s theory (Schön, 1983), professional teachers must distinguish between two types of reflection:

Reflection-in-Action: When teachers refine their methods during instruction.

Reflection-on-Action: When teachers analyze their performance post-instruction.

In this account, the teacher, by analyzing student feedback, modifies their teaching approach and embraces continuous learning as a professional growth opportunity.

Conclusion: Transforming the Culture of Inquiry in Education

This narrative illustrates how a culture of silence and fear of judgment can impede learning and progress in educational settings. Conversely, teachers and students who dare to ask questions are the true learners. The teacher, through storytelling, critical thinking prompts, and fostering an open environment for inquiry, challenged students and transformed the classroom culture. This experience underscores the pivotal role a teacher can play in reshaping societal attitudes towards learning and inquiry. Ultimately, this account reminds us that “the bravest thing is to ask for help,” and no one, including teachers, should fear posing questions.