

Fostering a Questioning Attitude in Children

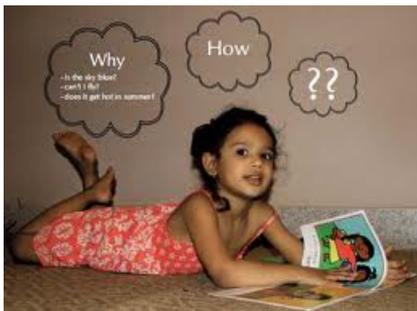
By [Rachana Misra](#) | Jun 9, 2014

The purpose of education is to make human beings capable, competent, and wise so as to meet the challenges of life. In a world that is dynamic, entropy and chaos quickly enter the picture as the pace of life becomes faster, the demands on an individual's mental, physical, and emotional resources increase and flexibility and adaptability become the buzz words. To accommodate all these factors, one needs to be innovative and creative, be able to work collaboratively, communicate effectively, think critically and be proactive.

It necessarily follows that education too must adapt and shift focus to teaching-learning methods that are based on inquiry, information creation, and knowledge construction – life skills that help in problem solving and decision making.

Our conventional education system lays stress on:

- Information gathering
- Quantum of information stored in memory
- Evaluation based on memorized material
- Chalk and talk method
- LOTS (Lower Order Thinking Skills)

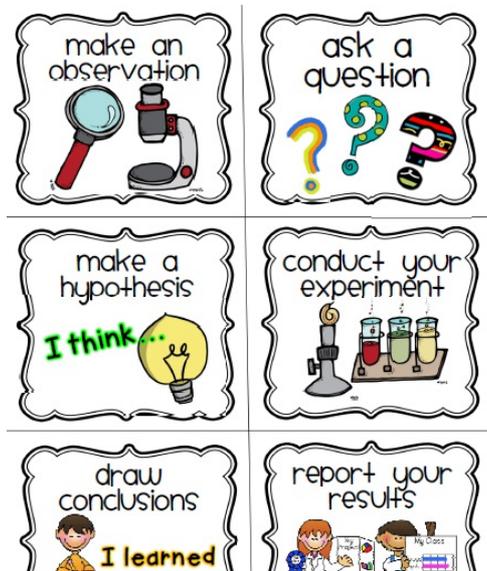


In this system, the questioning attitude is not encouraged making students passive information recipients rather than proactive knowledge creators. We need to work upon each of the areas outlined above in order to bring a meaningful change to the education system. Fostering a questioning attitude in children is perhaps the area that needs maximum qualitative and attitudinal change on the part of the educators. A questioning attitude is not just about ASKING QUESTIONS. It involves investing oneself in the experience of learning in order to create/construct meaning through research, effort, and application of one's mind using HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills).

When asked to list traits that characterize children who are 2-3 years old, teachers consistently list inquisitiveness and curiosity as being the defining traits for this age group. Thus, inquisitiveness and curiosity are traits possessed by all children even at an early age and form the foundation of the learning experience. Children use these traits in order to make sense of the world around them.

To illustrate, consider that for the topic 'Fruits we eat', a group of 3-4 year olds are asked to identify all the fruits that have been used to prepare a fruit salad served to them. Consider the method they would adopt in order to arrive at the answer. You will find that they are regular little scientists who intuitively follow the scientific approach in a perfectly logical way. They will incorporate the following steps:

- **Enquire:** The children will ask themselves or others questions that would give them leads or clues about the fruits that may have been used. They could ask questions about how many types of fruits appear to have been used, the different colours they can distinguish in the mix, the smells that they can identify, or the textures that may help them differentiate between the contents.
- **Explore:** The children will explore possible means to identify the contents. This would mean using their senses to guide them to answer the questions they asked in the 'Enquire' section. They may seek permission to taste or touch the contents.
- **Experiment:** The children will come up with 'things to do' on their own in order to answer the basic questions. 'I can see the yellow-orange pieces that are cut into squares. Can I eat one and see whether it is a papaya or a mango?'
- **Experience:** The children experience the results of the experiments which in this case mostly involves tasting, smelling, touching, and seeing to distinguish various components. They will also experience that answering the question requires them to be proactively involved in discovery by exploring the contents in ways that they decide are useful



in the context. This also helps them make judgments and decisions on what might work.



- **Evaluate:** Based on the experiments, the children will evaluate what they have found out. They will naturally use this knowledge to segregate the contents into fruits that they can identify and those that they cannot. In any case, they would have sorted the contents into all the components that went into making the mix.
- **Extrapolate:** The pieces that kids could not identify would always draw the children's attention and they will further exchange information or resort to guessing and offering opinions on what the unknown fruits might be based on their previous knowledge.
- **Express:** The children will enthusiastically confirm an identification as soon as it is made. They may do this by going up to the teacher or shouting out their discovery from their place in the class.

The children follow all these actions without being taught to do so. The steps may be overlapping, merged or distinct. By observing the children it can be inferred that constructing meaning is a PROCESS involving logical steps. It follows that learning also is, therefore, a PROCESS, facilitated greatly by teaching. We can thus conclude that **constructing knowledge involves a meaningful Teaching-Learning process**. Young children are propelled by inquisitiveness and curiosity, the need to explore, question, discover and interpret. To allow inquisitiveness and curiosity to flourish, the 7 'e's listed above are indispensable. For the 7 'e's to develop, a **questioning mind and a questioning attitude** are a must.

As children grow, the very traits that characterize early childhood, and which are central to the learning experience, shrink and peter out instead of developing more. The result is that children are unable to invest themselves fully in the experience of learning. They become 'passive information sponges'. The outcome of this entire series is that the creative and critical thinking skills are stunted, HOTS are limited, and the child is ill-prepared to face the demands of the real intensely competitive world.

This analysis brings us to a very pertinent question: Why do the traits central to learning and which all children inherently possess from a very early age, show regression? There are a number of reasons educators will list, the favourites being that lack of time to complete the syllabus leaves little time for anything other than lecture method to be adopted, lack of facilities and teaching aids to support and supplement the topic, disturbances in classes due to extra-curricular activities, large number of students in the class, burden of duties over and above teaching, etc.

Unfortunately, the tendency of passing on the buck is sadly apparent here. This is not to say that the above are not issues of concern, but certainly they are not so insurmountable as to not have any solutions at all. In every school there is a breed of teachers who will complete the syllabus on time, who will use innovative pedagogy, who will find resources and turn routine things into learning aids and who will be loved and respected by the students because they go that extra mile. Coming back to the question as to why children show regression in traits central to learning, we would do better as educators to introspect and pin a large part of the blame where it belongs, that is, with us. It is the teachers' attitudes and behaviours that are largely responsible.

Now, how do we develop the traits central to the learning experience instead of allowing them to peter out? The obvious answer is:

- Address the ATTITUDE of teachers towards questioning by students.
- Modify the BEHAVIOUR of teachers towards nurturing a questioning attitude in children.

Doing these will provide a big boost to preserving the traits central to learning. There is no denying that the role of the educator is of paramount importance in fostering a questioning attitude in children. Now that we have zeroed-in on what we as educators can do to stop the down-slide, we have to evolve strategies to remedy the situation without coming in direct confrontation with the education system. In my next article, I will discuss ways in which this can be done. The system has its positive points, we don't need to turn it on its head; we only need to modify it steadily and carefully towards efficiency.

Sources of images: teacherplus.org & educationalcreativityblogspot.com

Category: Teacher Development

Subject: Others

Board: All boards

Grade/Standard: Class 1-2
Class 3-5
Class 6-8
Class 9-10

License: CC BY-NC-SA

Source URL: <http://teachersofindia.org/en/article/fostering-questioning-attitude-children>