



A Situational Study on the Nature of Questions being Used in Early Grade Classes: My Experience in Government Schools of Mayurbhanj, Odisha

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ABSTRACT

Questioning is essential for two-way communication between a teacher and children or among children themselves. Questions play an important role in the processes of teaching and learning because children's achievement and their level of engagement depend on the types of questions teachers formulate and use in a classroom. Good questions promote child-centered teaching. As we move from a teacher-led mode of teaching and learning to more child-initiated approaches, questions rather than answers are imperative in shaping the socio-cognitive development of learners as they explore and make meaning in collaborative contexts. This paper outlines a situational study in 2 early grade classes in two model Government schools of Mayurbhanj district in Odisha. This paper mentions that it is important to focus on promoting novice teachers' knowledge and skills in questioning so that they can support children's higher levels of thinking. This is especially relevant for teachers of the Government schools working in India.

Keywords: Nature of questions, Government schools, teachers knowledge & skills, high level thinking and child-centered teaching

CARE India (an International Development Organization) had its intervention in 516 Government schools of Mayurbhanj district since the year 2014-2018 to enhance the reading skill of Children. It believed that "improvement of reading skill of children depends on the oral language development of children. Children at early age are curious beings. They look at their surroundings in awe, yearn to smell and touch what they haven't before, question what they don't understand. As children grow older, the frequency and types of questions asked does indeed change, but a child's thirst for knowledge still remains. Yet it's during these early years that their questions really need to be encouraged. The

classroom processes can be more effective when both the teachers and the children exchange their views through questions”. A study was conducted by CARE India to know the type of questions being used in schools at early grades. The objective was to know the current questioning practice in classrooms and to recommend suggestions to the district education department for its improvement.

Research Methodology

- The study was done in two model schools located in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. Classroom observation and teachers interview were two methods adopted for the study. The materials used for it were classroom observation tool and teacher’s interview formats etc.
- Classroom observations were made in two language classes in two different grades such as class-2 & class-3 facilitated by 2 different teachers with the use of a classroom observation tool, which contained the indicators to classify the nature of questions being asked by the teachers as well as by the children.
- The same teachers were also interviewed on what they think about questioning , what type of questions they ask, what they think are the different type of questions that can be asked on a story, do they promote children to ask questions etc.
- All the children of class-2 and class-3 of the said schools participated in the process.

Research Process

Before the study, discussion were made with the teachers and the Headmistress of the schools about the kind of study to be undertaken, selection of sample size and materials required for the study. They were apprised about the objective of the study in a nutshell. According to the suggestions, the teachers also designed their lesson plan accordingly. They collected all the required materials to conduct a picture reading class.

- On the first day, one of the teachers of the first school did the activity with class-2 children. At first, the teacher informed the children about the picture reading activity. The teacher initiated a picture reading class by showing a picture of an animal known to the children and asked questions to the children based on the pictures; it was a warm up activity. The children were also encouraged to ask questions to the teacher, which were also captured by the observer. The children asked the teacher whether the shown animal found in other villages? The teacher answered yes it is found in other villages. This activity ran for 10 minutes. Then after, the teacher used other pictures (conversation chart, action chart etc.) and asked different questions related to the picture. The teacher showed an action picture of a village. (a man catching fish, a woman washing clothes, some men and women taking bath, ducks are swimming on the water, women cleaning utensils, people brushing teeth and washing face etc.). The teacher asked the children what the man is

doing? What is that in the hand of the man? What is the woman doing? The teacher was seen asking direct and factual questions to the children. The activity continued for 30 minutes. During the classroom transaction, the children asked what is the name of the village? Who brought the picture? What are the children doing? The teacher answered the questions either in a word or in a sentence. The teacher did not seem to be well prepared,



Teacher asking questions to children in language class

so she showed another picture of a “market”. She again asked some close ended questions like who are going to market? What is the man buying from the shop? Who has gone with him? The teacher asked whether the children have ever gone to any market? This kind of activity continued for 20 more minutes. The teacher again asked the children whether they enjoyed the class? The children replied yes. Most of the time it was seen that the children asked only yes/no type questions to the teacher? This class was a 1 hour class, which included 10 minutes writing activity. The observer noted down the questions and answers given by the children.

- On the second day, another teacher facilitated an activity with class-3 children in the second school. The teacher sang a song with action; the children followed the action. After recitation of the song for 3 or 4 times, the teacher put some questions to the children related to the song. The children were also encouraged to ask questions for better understanding. In the beginning, the teacher did a warm up activity with the children. She asked the children to sing any kind of song they like. Some of the children sang regional songs, some of them felt shy and did not sing at all and the rest children sang a choral song. It was an interesting activity and children enjoyed it well. This activity ran for 15 minutes. Then the teacher started singing an action song and asked the children to follow her. She recited the song for 4 to 5 times and asked the children to sing the song with her. It was seen, even the teacher stopped singing and the children continued singing. It was a simple and a local song.

The name of the song was “*Tuma Pari Chhota Pilatia*”. This is a very popular song on the Odia Hero “Madhusudan Das”. The children were very much enthusiastic and sang the song with action. After singing the song, the children sat together and the teacher started asking questions based on the song like who fell down? Who brought the children together to repair the village road? What did the village children do? What did the teacher say to Madhubabu? The children tried to answer the questions in a word or in few sentences. This class was of 45 minutes which included 10 minutes writing assignment based on the topic.

- Then, the number of questions asked by the children and the teachers were counted after each class transaction. The questions asked and answers given in each class were categorized according to their nature through the use of an analysis table.

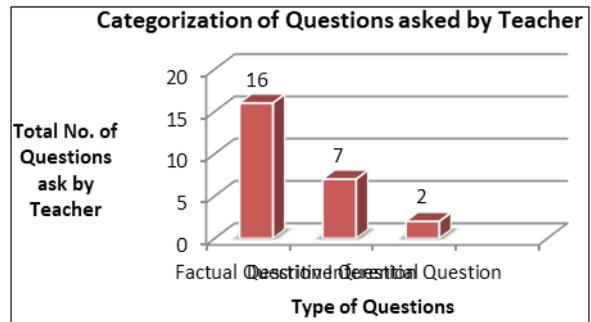
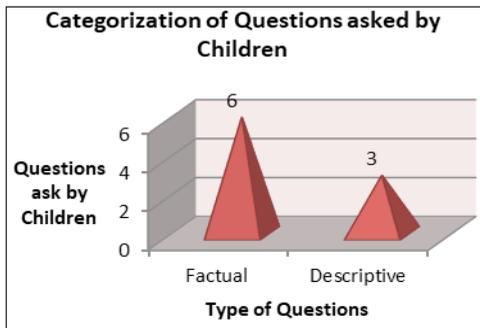
General Observation

After the two day’s classroom observation, two teachers were interviewed with certain questions prepared previously for the purpose. Teacher’s interview observation made it clear that the teachers often asked questions to the children to bring their attention to the topic. It was pointed out that more questions were answered by few students. In the two classes, it was seen though there was scope for question/answer sessions, but the teachers were confined largely to the close ended questions only. The children answered more factual questions as compared to the inferential and descriptive questions. The children also asked few questions but some of the children asked more questions. They asked both factual and descriptive questions during the classroom processes. In few cases, the questions asked by the children were answered by their peers. When the children were told any interesting story or shown any attractive picture, they started asking questions with curiosity. Most of the time, the children were encouraged and inspired to ask more and more questions to be confident and realistic in future. The teachers had to think different steps to create an enabling environment for children in the classroom in particular and in the school in general.

Data Analysis & Result

<i>Classes observed</i>	<i>Total Number of questions asked by the teachers under each category:</i>			<i>Total Number of questions asked by the children under each category:</i>			<i>Nature of answers received from the children in all observations</i>				
	<i>F</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>O</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>D</i>	
							❖ <i>None (N)</i>				
							❖ <i>1 word (W)</i>				
							❖ <i>1 or 2 sentence (S)</i>				
							❖ <i>Detailed answer (D)</i>				
School 1 Class 2	6	—	3	4	—	—	—	9	—	—	
School 2 Class 3	10	2	4	2	—	3	—	11	3	2	

The above table shows that out of 9 questions asked by the teacher in class 2, 6 were factual and 3 were descriptive. In class 3, out of 16 questions asked by the teacher, 10 were factual, 2 inferential and 4 were descriptive. While analyzing the total number of questions asked by the teachers in both the classes, it can be derived that the percentage of factual questions asked was 64%, the percentage of descriptive question was 28% and the percentage of inferential question was 8% only. Secondly, the children asked 9 questions in total, out of which about 67% questions were factual and 33% questions were descriptive. The last column of the table clearly says that out of 25 questions put to the children by the teachers 8% answers were detailed answer, 1 2% were one or two sentence answers and the rest 80% were one word answers.



- Observation stated that very few descriptive and inferential questions were put by the teachers as well as by the children during classroom activity.
- The number of questions asked by the teachers in class 2 & class 3 was 25.
- Out of 25 questions put by the teachers, the number of factual question was 16, the number of descriptive question was 7 and the number of inferential question was 2.
- During the classroom observation, it was found that the children asked 9 questions, out of which 6 questions were factual and 3 questions were descriptive (classroom observation).

CONCLUSION

It was found that the teachers involved in the teaching-learning process lacked knowledge of the way they structured and processed the questioning episodes. They were not aware of the importance of using effective questions as a teaching technique. This research has highlighted the importance of carefully planning appropriate questions before implementation as well as the facilitation of child initiated learning experiences. The above analysis also concludes that the number of inferential and descriptive questions should be increased more and more, which really helps in improving the language skill of children. The children should also be encouraged to answer the questions in detailed, which can improve the higher order thinking ability and comprehension skill of children to a larger extent. The newly appointed teachers need to be imparted training on the importance of various form of questions, their usage & relevance in classroom process. The children need to be encouraged and motivated to formulate and ask different questions during classroom process. This project paper was shared with the school teachers, district level education officials and suggestions were recommended to improve questioning practice in schools.

REFERENCES

- Project brief report prepared by CARE India, www.careindia.org
- Operational Strategy prepared by CARE India, www.careindia.org

APPENDICES

Duration of the class: 60 min

(A) Day: 1 Class: 2

<i>Questions asked by the teacher</i>	<i>Answer given by the children</i>	<i>Question asked by the children</i>	<i>Answer given by teacher or peer</i>	<i>Context in which the question is asked</i>	<i>Number of questions asked by the teacher</i>	<i>No. of question asked by the children</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the man doing? 2. What is that in the hand of the man? 3. What is the woman doing? 4. What are the ducks doing? 5. What are the buffalos doing? 6. Who is throwing a net to the water? 7. Why is man throwing the net? 8. Why is the man milking the cow? 9. Why the woman is washing clothes in the pond? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Catching fish 2. Net 3. Washing clothes 4. Swimming 5. Taking bath 6. A man 7. To catch the fish and eat 8. To drink the milk or sell 9. No water available 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who brought the picture? 2. What is the name of the village? 3. What are the children doing? 4. Who are the others living in water? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I brought (teacher) 2. No name (teacher) 3. Playing with the mud 4. Many animals 	While conducting an oral language class	9	4

Duration of the class: 45 min

(B) Day: 2 Class: 3

<i>Questions asked by the teacher</i>	<i>Answer given by the children</i>	<i>Question asked by the children</i>	<i>Answer given by teacher or peer</i>	<i>Context in which the question is asked</i>	<i>Number of questions asked by the teacher</i>	<i>No. of question asked by the children</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Where was the child studying? Where was the child going? Who fell down? Who asked the child why he was late? What did the children collect to repair the road? Who is called Madhu barrister? At what time they repaired the road? What was the child like? Was the child interested to go to school? How was the child looking? Why did the child fall down? What did the child do to repair the village road? Why did others like him? Why was he called Madhu Barrister? What would you have done, if you were in the place of Madhubabu? If the child had not taken steps for repairing the road, what would have happened? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In <i>Chatasali</i> To <i>Chatasali</i> The child The teacher Stones, sand etc Madhusudan Das Dusshera The child was very smart and truthful Very much interested Healthy and fine He was walking fast and the ground was slippery He called his friends and asked them to help him repair the road He was benevolent He passed law I would have got the road repaired with my friends The village people would have repaired the road 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Who called him barrister? Was he studying well? Why was he so hurry to go to school? Why did he call all his friends? Why did he call his friends during Dusshera? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> People Yes He was late to school To take steps for repairing the road It was holiday time, there would be no harm to studies 	While conducting an oral language class	16	5

(C) Teacher Interview (questionnaire with answer)

- (a) Do you like to ask questions to children during classroom transaction?

Ans. Yes, I like to ask questions to children during classroom transaction.

- (b) If yes, then at what time you ask questions to children?

Ans. I ask questions to the children, when they are inattentive.

- (c) Do you ask more number of questions to the children?

Ans. Yes, I ask questions according to the nature of the topic I teach.

- (d) Are most of the children able to answer your questions?

Ans. No, only few are able to answer questions.

- (e) Which types of questions are mostly answered by children?

Ans. Factual questions are mostly answered by children.

- (f) Do the children ask you questions?

Ans. The children ask questions, if they are told any interesting story or shown any attractive picture.

- (g) Which types of questions are often asked by the children?

Ans. The children usually ask factual questions.

- (h) Are the answers sometimes given by their peers?

Ans. On few occasions answers are given by peers.

- (i) Do the children ask more questions?

Ans. No, only few children ask questions.

- (j) On which context more questions are asked either by you or by children?

Ans. When the children are curious to know something, they ask question and we ask questions to the inattentive children.