

QAR (Question-Answer Relationship): A Solution to Building Up Students' Question-raising Ability?

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ABSTRACT

Many a teacher will agree with me when I say there is usually silence when high school teachers ask if there is any question in class. It is important to raise a question on what you are reading, for it is one of the crucial indexes for a reader to reach a full comprehension on the materials one is reading and cultivate a reader's critical thinking ability. When I learned the principle of QAR (Question-Answer Relationship), it dawned on me that it might be a solution to breaking the dead silence and establishing students' question-raising ability. Thus, to make it easier for students to know how to raise a question, I decided to introduce the principle of QAR to my students and assist my students in applying the principle to their reading activity in my action research. The principle of QAR has been applied in the western education system for a while, but many Taiwanese students such as my high school students have never learned the strategy. In that case, I have every reason to exploit the principle in my action research.

Key word: QAR, Question-raising, Action research, Taiwanese students

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I. Introduction

Our high school students usually do not ask questions, do they? Many a teacher in Taiwan will agree with me when I say there is usually silence when high school teachers ask if there is any question in class. Are our students being shy? Or they really do not have any question, or they just simply do not know how to raise a question? For the former, encouragement seems to be a fundamental solution; as for the latter, there should be some approaches we can take to help students build up the skill of raising questions on the materials they are reading. It is important to raise a question on what you are working on, for it is also one of the crucial indexes for a reader to reach a full comprehension on the materials one is reading and cultivate a reader's critical thinking ability. Therefore, when I learned the principle of QAR (Question-Answer Relationship), it dawned on me that it might be a solution to breaking the dead silence. Fenty, MacDuffie-Landrum and Fisher also approve of the advantage of QAR in helping student's reading comprehension, stating that "QAR allows students to demonstrate their ability to determine importance, make inferences, and monitor their comprehension (2012)." Thus, to make it easier for students to know how to raise a question, I decided to introduce the principle of QAR to my students and assist my students in applying the principle to their reading activity in my action research. Though it takes time to cultivate one's ability to think critically, taking the initiative is always the first step to reach the goal. The principle of QAR has been applied in the western education system for a while, but many Taiwanese students such as my high school students have never learned the strategy. In that case, I have every reason to exploit the principle in my action research.

My action research is presented in the following aspects.

II. Description of research issue and QAR

A question often came to my mind when I was required to do action research: what could I do in class so that my students would be more willing to ask more questions on the reading materials we worked on together, for an active interaction

between teachers and students was what I always longed for in class? To solve the problem and create an interactive teaching scenario, I decided to employ the principle of QAR in class. Basically, QAR (Question-Answer Relationship) is a strategy that helps students understand the different types of questions and how to locate the answers to those questions. In this strategy, there are two categories of questions; one is “In the Books” and the other is “In My Head”. In these two categories, there are four different types of questions: one is “Right there”, and another is “Think and Search”, both of which are under the category of “In the Books.” Still another is “Author and You,” and the other is “On My Own,” both of which are under the category of “In My Head.” In addition to QAR, I also plan to introduce the concept of facts and opinions to the students, for the first two types of questions have a lot to do with facts, while the last two with opinions. As to the materials, since my subjects, 78 in total, for my research are all 12 graders who are facing the important college entrance examination this year, news articles become my first choice for the students’ reading material with a view to both improving their ability of reading comprehension and preparing for the crucial exam. The research lasted for four weeks, and one hour per week was spent on it. Thy syllabus is as follows:

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Scaffolding students’ knowledge about facts and opinions	Scaffolding students’ knowledge about QAR	Hands-on practice on facts and opinions with QAR through news articles.	Hands-on practice on facts and opinions with QAR through news articles.

The procedures are elaborated in the following sections.

III. The procedures of the research

(1) Week 1: Facts and Opinions

- (A) To enlighten the students that facts and opinions are around in their life, a work sheet of observation of their classroom is designed. (See appendix I)
- (B) Have the students work in groups to write down what they have observed in a complete sentence about the area assigned.
- (C) After the task, the teacher asks the students to put the worksheet away temporarily and use PowerPoint slides to scaffold the students' knowledge on the definition of facts and opinions.
- (D) When the students build up the knowledge of facts and opinions, the teacher provides more examples for them to confirm their understanding.
- (E) After finishing all the practices, the teacher now requires the students to take out the worksheet done previously and sort their own sentences into facts and opinions.
- (F) The teacher wraps up the class by sharing with the students that facts and opinions can be found not only in their reading materials but also in their life.

During the mingling for comparing their answers to the practice, peer learning was observed going on fiercely when different answers appear. I did not interfere with their argument until the students' understanding went too astray. At this moment, the teacher has to check if the students have understood the definition of facts and opinions. With the teacher's guidance, the students debated actively about the definition of facts and opinions, and along with the process, final agreement could usually be achieved. The students replied that after this kind of discussion, the definition was actually getting concrete to them.

Week 2: QAR

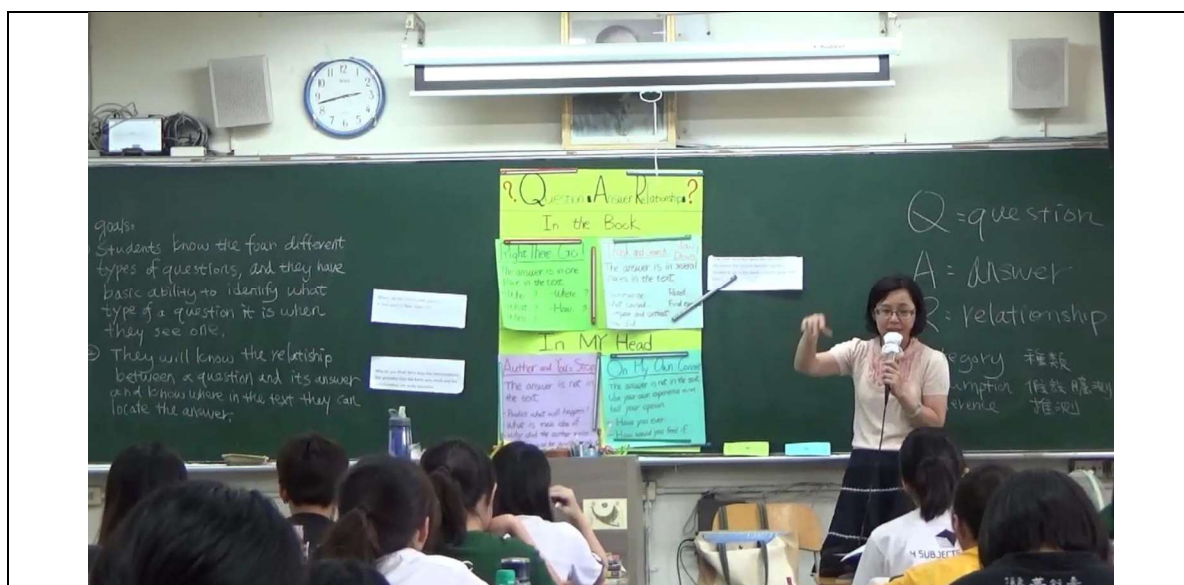
- (G) The teacher has the students watch a footage about the strategy of QAR without them taking any notes.

- (H)After the footage, the teacher gives some scattered straps with all the information about QAR which the students have just learned from the footage on them; the students have to work as a team to reorganize those straps into tidy ones like what they have seen in the clip.
- (I)After the teamwork, the teacher elaborates the strategy of QAR with a QAR poster and provides more examples. (See Appendix II)
- (J)The students practice distinguishing different types of questions using the reading comprehension questions from General Scholastic Ability Test.
- (K)The teacher wraps up the class by confirming the different types of questions usually appearing in the GSAT.

During the teamwork task, one could observe that those who had strong understanding of the strategy naturally became the group leaders leading the discussion. In this way, these group leaders turned into the teacher's doubles checking how well the students absorbed the information they had received. During the practice, sometimes different opinions about the type of one certain question emerged, and each student would give out their reasons to support their own answer, which is indeed a very satisfying situation for thinking critically. Therefore, encountering this situation, I did not provide a direct, specific answer to the question. Instead, I allowed the students to keep their own answers by telling them when their supporting evidence was enough and reasonable, their answers were the answers, for critical thinking is not to find out an answer, but to find out how to think.

(2)Week 3: Hands-on Practice

- (A)The teacher has the students read silently a news article.
- (B)After the students finish reading, the teacher has them work in groups to find out which sentence is a fact and which an opinion.
- (C)The teacher puts the QAR poster on the blackboard so that the students can refer to it at any time when they work on the next task. See the picture below.



- (D)The students work as a group to design four types of questions based on the news article.
- (E)Each group posts their questions on the blackboard and each group competes to answer the questions from other groups other than their own ones.
- (F)The teacher draws an end to the class by confirming the answers to each question.

(3)Week 4: Hands-on Practice

- (A)The teacher has the students read silently a news article.
- (B)The teacher requires the students to discuss with their neighbors about what is said in the article, and places the “grass skirt” questions in position. The questions are designed based on the strategy of QAR. (See appendix III)
- (C)The teacher explains the rule of the “grass skirt” task to the students.
- (D)The students work as a group to compete to answer all the questions related to the article.
- (E)The teacher concludes the class by confirming the answers to each question.

The students got more familiar with QAR strategy after practicing more for two classes. During completing the task for the teamwork, a quicker reaction to what

type of question a question is was observed. The students were more confident to find out the answers to different types of questions. More of them could point out their classmates' mistakes when wrong answers were given and offered their reasons. Though small arguments appeared from time to time, they were always welcome and invited in a class where critical thinking was desired.

IV. Survey Result of the Research

At the end of the last class, I have designed some survey questions to collect the students' response to the four classes. (See Appendix IV for the complete questions and results.) In terms of teaching plan for facts and opinions, approximately 65 out of 78 students agree that the definition of the two terms is clearly defined and the related practices greatly help them to confirm their understanding of the terms. For QAR strategy, nearly all of the students agree that the strategy is clearly presented in the film and the poster. Most of the students hold a positive attitude toward the teaching plan and depict that what they have learned in class help them understand better how reading comprehension questions are raised and how they can find out the answers to the different types of questions. Of all the survey questions, one is more important and meaningful than the others for me: Question No. 8. In the question, the students are asked if they will be more willing to raise some questions on the material they are reading because they have the knowledge of facts and opinions and learned the strategy of QAR. Over 70 percent of the students replied in a very positive way about the result. Their feedback has bestowed me with a lot of encouragement although there are still two of them who disagree with the statement. From the survey result, it seems that what I have taught students indeed provides certain assistance in raising students' questioning skill; in that case, I would like to regard the research as successful. However, after the research is done, in reality there is not much more hand-raising in class than before. From this perspective, it seems the research has failed. Yet, I believe the ability of critical thinking takes time to cultivate. Since most of the students have responded to the strategy positively, we high school teachers may consider teaching the

principle earlier. Even the elementary and secondary school teachers can take building students the strategy of QAR into consideration for reading training since Raphael and Au also elaborate, “We believe QAR provides a framework that offers teachers a straightforward approach for reading comprehension instruction with the potential of eventually closing the literacy achievement gap. QAR can serve as a reasonable starting point for addressing four problems of practice that stand in the way of moving all students to high levels of literacy (2005).” Indeed, since literacy-orientation has become the main target for the 12-Year Basic Education Curricula, we teachers might empower our students with more knowledge and ability to do critical thinking by applying QAR strategy. Though my research is not a very big one, it has enlightened me that we teachers can always do more to bring some changes for our students. It always takes time for changes to take place, but every change, big or small, matters.

References

- 1.Fenty, Nicole S; McDuffie-Landrum, Kim; Fisher, Gary. *Teaching Exceptional Children*; Jul/Aug 2012; 44, 6; Education Collection pg. 28.
- 2.Raphae, Taffy E; Au, Kathryn H. *The Reading Teacher*; Nov. 2005; 59, 3; ProQuest pg. 206.

Appendix I

Worksheet for Facts and Opinions Class: team members:

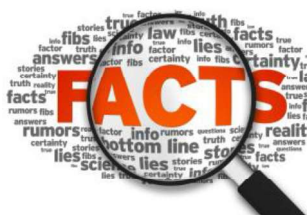
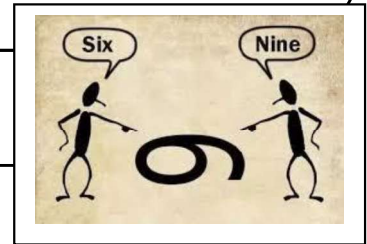
Write down what you have observed about the front of the classroom.

(e.g. I saw a clock. There is a blackboard. The chair is in yellow color.




Terry is cute. 😊)

Facts

Opinions



Appendix II

 <h2>Question Answer Relationship</h2>	
<h3>In the book</h3> 	
<p><u>Right There—Go!</u> The answer is in one place in the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Who...? --What...? --When...? --Where...? --How...? 	<p><u>Think and Search: Slow Down!</u> The answer is in several places in the text.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarize... What caused... Compare and Contrast How did... Retell... Find 2 examples.
 <h3>In My Head</h3>	
<p><u>Author and You: Stop!</u> The answer is not in the text. The reader has to use prior knowledge and information from the text to get the answer. It's known as "inference."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Predict what will happen... --What is the main idea of... --What could be another title for...? --Why did the author write...? 	<p><u>On My Own: Connect!</u> The answer is not in the text. Use your own experience and tell your opinions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> --Have you ever...? --How would you feel if...?

Appendix III

Grass Skirt Activity

Q10	Pick one fact in paragraph three.
Q9	Which of the following statement is true? The twin the scientist experimented on are boys. (B) The experiment is conducted by the scientist alone without any financial sponsors. (C) The mother in the experiment was HIV-positive and the father was HIV-negative. (D) Many countries allow scientists to experiment on gene-editing research without limitation.
Q8	Pick one opinion in paragraph two.
Q7	Which of these words is closest in meaning to “monstrous” in the third paragraph? (A) elaborate (B) outrageous (C) militant (D) unrestrained
Q6	Pick one fact in paragraph one.
Q5	In paragraph 3 line 3, the statement “Many felt...monstrous” is.
Q4	What does the passage say about Professor He’s university? (A) It is located in Hong Kong. (B) It has been heavily criticized. (C) It supported his experiment. (D) It is investigating his claims.
Q3	What can be inferred about Professor He Jiankui? (A) He is supported by the Chinese government. (B) Many other scientists have copied his work. (C) He has worked on genomes for 18 years. (D) He has been willing to try new experiments
Q2	In paragraph 2, line I, the statement “Gene-editing ..., including China.” is _____.
Q1	What is the passage mainly about? (A) Some scientific work and reactions to it. (B) An experiment on newborn babies. (C) A scientist’s speech at a conference. (D) A new discovery about human genes.

Appendix IV

Questions	非常同意	同意	尚可	不同意	非常不同意
1. Fact and opinion 的定義清楚、明瞭。	54.29% 38	40.00% 28	5.71% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
2. Fact and Opinion 的練習有幫助我更加瞭解什麼是 facts, 什麼是 opinions。	71.43% 50	25.71% 18	2.86% 2	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
3. QAR 的影片與海報清楚說明 QAR 的內容。	65.71% 46	28.57% 20	5.71% 4	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
4. QAR 的分組練習有幫助我更瞭解 QAR。	58.57% 41	34.29% 24	5.71% 4	1.43% 1	0.00% 0
5. 我現在可以清楚分辨 Fact and Opinion, 尤其是新聞。	45.71% 32	44.29% 31	10.00% 7	0.00% 0	0.00% 0
6. 學習 QAR 有幫助我更加瞭解如何回答閱讀測驗的題目。	42.86% 30	40.00% 28	14.29% 10	1.43% 1	1.43% 1
7. 學習 QAR 使我瞭解如何對一篇文章提出問題。	47.14% 33	37.14% 26	12.86% 9	2.86% 2	0.00% 0
8. 因為有 fact and opinion 與 QAR 的知識, 我會比較願意對自己閱讀的東西提出問題。	42.86% 30	32.86% 23	21.43% 15	2.86% 2	0.00% 0
9. 我覺得每位同學都應該學習 fact and opinion 和 QAR 的知識來幫助閱讀, 尤其是新聞。	58.57% 41	27.14% 19	10.00% 7	2.86% 2	1.43% 1