

TEACHING THROUGH TESTING

Yrd.Doç.Dr.
Abdulkadir Çakır

S.Ü. Eğitim Fakültesi
Öğretim Üyesi

It is a known fact that tests which occupy a very crucial place in teaching urge students to study harder as current testing in many countries is considered to measure students' knowledge or learning on certain topics over a given period of time rather than teachers' degree of achievement in teaching them. Since students' success is judged through testing, tests are dreaded so much so that they have become nightmares of most students. We can overcome the anxiety and make learning more enjoyable through testing. Furthermore, testing can be an encouraging and motivating activity if students are given the opportunity of preparing the tests themselves.

In this article, we suggest using testing not only as a means of measuring students' knowledge on the course material but also as a technique of teaching. Of course, that does not mean that students will have no other activities in class except preparing tests and taking them. We consider testing as one of the supplementary aids besides being a means of grading. Learning, in true sense, can occur if we, teachers, can guide our students properly in preparing the tests to measure their learning the courses that we offer.

At this point, the question to be answered is how teachers can assist students to prepare the test questions that will cover all subjects they have studied and measure students' success of learning objectively. If we can supply students with certain criteria and knowledge about the characteristics of the test questions, they will be motivated to prepare the right questions and learn a lot while preparing them. One of the major points to be kept in mind is that preparing the questions in accordance with the given criteria and requirements is prerequisite in grading. In other words, if the questions do not have the wanted qualifications, students fail just at the very beginning. Thus, preparing easy and simple questions in order to get good grades has no ground to depend on. This sort of testing requires both preparing the convenient questions and knowing accurate answers. Teachers' clear directions and explanations concerning the nature of the questions is of great significance in conducting this technique successfully. To prepare fair and objective tests relevant to the course material studied, on a large scale, depends on students' skill of understanding what type of questions they are supposed to prepare. In order to be able to prepare the required questions and answer them properly, students have to study the course material very carefully and consciously and notice all important points that might be worth being asked besides understanding the teacher's instructions concerning the questions.

We believe this technique will put an end to the complaints and the fuss made by students concerning the questions for their poor performance in the exams. Teachers will be free from such accusations. If one is to be blamed for being unsuccessful, it will not be the teacher any longer.

The testing model we have been trying to illustrate can be understood better studying the following sample test questions and their answers on the following essays and stories.

The course material to be tested is as follows:

1. Linton's essay "Process of Culture Change"
2. Nida's essay "Queer Sounds, Strange Grammars and Unexpected Meaning"
3. Saroyan's story "Pomegranate Trees"
4. Faulkner's story "A Rose For Emily"

As we have already mentioned a few times, this test technique involves students' preparing the questions fulfilling certain requirements given by the teacher. The test we are suggesting is to be prepared by upperintermediate and /for advanced students who have studied the above material. The teacher should tell them the exact number of questions and the content and the nature of the points to be included in each question. For example, to test the first essay a question like the following can be designed.

A. Criticize Linton's essay "Process of Culture Change" considering the following points:

1. Style
2. Presentation of the material
3. Main characteristics of that particular essay
4. Organization

The question could be improved and some other points in the story can be asked, of course.

The expected answer to such a question could be something like the following:

His style is formal standard English. He is quite objective. He rarely uses first person singular "I" and never refers to his readers as "you". He uses some connecting words to compare and contrast his ideas.

He presents his ideas in a chronological order. His essay is not a jumble of thoughts and theories but a sequences of ideas, assumptions and clear examples. He does two jobs at the same time. He gives the reader a background while developing a theory. Although the whole essay seems complicated, the paragraphs are pretty clear.

Explanatory information, technical vocabulary, the frequent use of "to be", prepositional phrases and development of complicated ideas into clear sentences are the main characteristics of this essay.

He develops a topic sentence into a paragraph. He gives some examples to explain the topic sentence or compares and contrasts it by using some connecting words. All paragraphs are logically and skillfully connected. In short, he has followed every "step of writing an essay".

Now let's prepare a question including at least three points to be answered on Nida's essay.

B. Give us a short but basic information about Nida's essay "Queer Sounds, Strange Grammars and Unexpected Meaning" on the following points.

1. The subject matter
2. Nature of the writer
3. Organization

The expected answer to this question should be like the following:

His essay is about the arbitrariness of languages. Languages are arbitrary not only in terms of their sound and structural systems but also meaning of words. No matter how simple they seem, every language has thousands of words and a structure. No one society has worked out the interpretation of the words before they use them.

His essay is a more personal and less formal example of textbook style. He involves both the reader and himself producing sentences beginning with "we". He uses some daily expressions such as "of course", "perhaps". As his material is factual, he makes use of his experience and study. The whole essay is clear and not complicated.

He starts every paragraph with a general statement and then develops it into a paragraph by giving examples. All paragraphs are in balance in terms of the ideas and examples. I can say that he has developed general statements into paragraphs and the paragraphs into an essay perfectly.

The third question will cover the rest of the course material. That is to say Saroyan's and Faulkner's stories will be tested in the last question.

C. Find out the basic differences and similarities between Saroyan's "Pomegranate Trees" and Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" by contrasting and comparing the following points.

1. Style
2. Subject matter
3. Characters of the stories
4. Organization

The expected answer might be something like the following:

Saroyan's style is very natural. He uses simple, pure, colloquial and conversational English. Faulkner uses formal, complicated English, Saroyan is very informal and personal. He uses "I" and common daily expressions. They

both use English fluently and they both appeal to the feelings of the reader effectively.

The origin of their subject matter is the society, but Saroyan deals with the problems of ordinary people. They deal with different social problems from different viewpoints. Their stories are like the mirror of the society.

They choose their characters from the actual life. In Saroyan's story, the characters are ordinary people, he himself also is a character. Faulkner does not involve himself in his story directly but his ideas are symbolized by other characters. In Faulkner's story, exaggeration and symbolization are frequently used but we can't see these factors in Saroyan's story. Both writers choose the people who have problems which are widespread in the society.

In Saroyan's story everything is crystal clear from the beginning till the end. You can guess the result more or less, but in Faulkner's story, something is kept mysterious. At the end of the story, the reader meets a surprise.

As you see in the sample questions and answers, to prepare the questions that are compatible with the teacher's instructions and answer them properly call for a very watchful and conscious study on the students' part.

We can kill a lot of birds with one stone applying this student-centered technique. Students will discover the ways of self-learning, recover self-confidence, and overcome the everlasting test fear.

We are of the opinion that to apply this model of testing gradually will be a good idea. The teacher may ask most of the questions himself (herself) and allow the students to ask just a few at the beginning until students get accustomed to this model of testing. Then they may be asked to prepare half of the questions and finally all of them may be prepared by students. In this way, students learn how to prepare the questions in accordance with the instructions of the teacher on their own and study the material to be tested enthusiastically to do a good job.

We know by experience this model of testing works very well and believe that you will agree with us if you try the same technique with your students.

REFERENCES

- Linton, Ralph. "Process of Culture Change".
Reading in English. Ed. Dorothy Danielson and Rebecca Hayden.
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1961
- Nida, Eugene A. "Queer Sounds, Strange Grammars and Unexpected
Meaning". Ibid.
- Saroyan, William. "Pomegranate Trees". Ibid.
- Faulkner, William. "A Rose for Emily". Ibid.