The Role of the Student in the Didactic Process: A Case Study

Hadia Khaznah Katbi and Layla F. Abdeen

The University of Jordan
The World Islamic Science and Education University

Abstract: In light of the vast scholarly research in academia, it is about time to invite students of various disciplines to become active participants rather than mere reticent receivers in the educational process in the twenty first century. One objective in literary appreciation is not only to rely on the available critical works, but also to encourage one’s own relevant analysis of the work. Having taught bilingual courses at state and private universities in Jordan, it is not entirely the students’ fault to have a preference toward conventional in-class “spoon feeding”. But with suitable encouragement, students could be evoked to adopt a line of critical thinking that will inevitably enrich their perception at large. A case study was executed for four weeks in which six students of both genders of the B.A. level of literary studies were introduced to Edger Allen Poe’s short story entitled “The Story of William Wilson”. The purpose of this case study is to investigate how students could become key players in the educational process if credited for original thinking. The findings prove that with adequate instruction, students’ analytical skills will sharpen. Consequently, student-centricity is maximized upon since it is one of the major corner-stones in the finding of a world-class university in our part of the world.

Key words: Reality - Critical thinking and didactic process

INTRODUCTION

This research examines the possibility of getting students actively involved in their assigned literary material, which will inevitably and drastically enhance their overall literary appreciation. Students are disillusioned, at times and “obliged”, at others, to do what they are expected to do in terms of reading the assigned literary work in order to come to class somewhat prepared. In this regard, the primary goal of some is to score satisfactory grades in a particular course to improve one’s overall average.

But, unfortunately, instructors are sometimes in for a big disappointment in line with even these “modest” expectations. What students normally do is that they try to solely read the secondary critical materials or search for their summaries on the internet without really delving into the primary literary work itself. As a result, a case study had been thought of to enhance students’ centrality since “[f]or teaching purposes, a case study need not contain a complete or accurate rendition of actual events; rather, its purpose is to establish a framework for discussion and debate among students” [1].

Problem: Having taught a number of literary courses, it is evident that a segment of students are not sufficiently engaged in the in-class didactic process. These students attend sessions to record information rather than to analyze and later on appreciate the literary work as a whole.

As time goes on, these students actually become a burden not only on the instructor, who ought to function as a mediator, but also on themselves. Therefore, what if we, instructors, try a different approach by introducing students of the B.A. level majoring in lingual and literary studies to a literary text without offering them secondary references?

Objectives: The main objective of this case study is to explore how students could become key-players in the pedagogical process in the lecture hall. Another reason behind conducting this case study is the belief that it is about time for instructors to devotedly assist their students in elevating their potentials through adequate supervision and instruction precisely by encouraging critical and creative thinking. Some students may be daunted at times to voice pieces of their minds.

Corresponding Author: Hadia Khaznah Katbi, The University of Jordan.
This automatically turns them into mere passive recipients. In fact, passive recipients, who may only exist physically rather than also mentally in the lecture hall do not add a contribution of the presumably brain storming session that should be taking place in class. As a result, the approach of “spoon feeding” ought to gradually cease as students benefit more sometimes from both proving themselves in the lecture hall as well as from peer interaction.

**Methodology:** As academic instructors of bilingualism, six bilingual students were selected to read a short story by Edger Allan Poe entitled “The Story of William Wilson”. Students were expected to read the short story without reference to any secondary critical material that may grant them some insight pertaining to the justification of some events in the story. Secondary critical materials are considered to be very useful in relation to this particular short story due to the diverse ambiguities that are engaged in the construction of the plot.

Poe adopts a somewhat ambiguous technique in regard to the synchronization of events. He portrays everyday situations that travel in different settings. He eventually constructs alternative realities. As a result, in order to appreciate such a work, one has to suspend disbelief and to stretch his / her imagination by accepting the constructed world of the story.

“The Story of William Wilson” revolves around an ordinary boy of modern times, who calls himself William Wilson. Suspicion, on part of the reader, starts to exist as soon as the story unfolds. William states that the cause of his misery is his name that he detests so much due to its commonness. He says that: “LET ME CALL MYSELF, for the present William Wilson. The fair page now lying before me need not be sullied with my real appellation. This has been already too much an object for the scorn–for the horror–for the detestation of my race.” [2].

Furthermore, “The Story of William Wilson” offers a number of dichotomies of persons with the existence of the two Williams “[He] bore the same Christian and surname as myself–a circumstance, in fact, little remarkable; for, notwithstanding a noble descent, mine was one of those everyday appellations which seem, by prescriptive right to have been, time of mind, the common property of the mob.” [3]. There is also confusion between linear time and imagined time as well as between actual and fabricated or imagined situations.

Due to all of these challenges in the story, the reading of each subject in the case study is extremely essential in constructing an understanding of the short story based upon the key roles of the two Williams. This presents what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a carnival of realities. According to him, this diversity of voices by different characters paves the way for a fragmentation rather than a complete and unified perspective of the events in the novel. This fragmentation leads to the permissibility of various views, which eventually leads to a multiplicity of ‘truths’. [4].

**The Case Study:** Three males and three females were chosen as subjects of the case study to serve as a sample; taking into consideration that one of each gender is of the poor, average and excellent levels. Students were notified and made aware of the importance of their critical opinions without making use of any soft or hard copy that would serve as a secondary material. This had been underscored by the fact that none of these subjects will be graded for his / her performance in our concerned meeting sessions because the reading of each is crucial to the comprehension of the novel itself.

In accordance with Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction, each student was notified that he / she is entitled to his / her own reading of the text. Patricia Waugh states that having more than one reading of a certain literary text is described as deconstruction by Derrida because language could be attained at various levels of perception [5]. Consequently, each subject was encouraged to stretch his / her imagination based upon the primary source, which was given to them ahead of time for reading and understanding.

In this regard, Roger Webster argues that according to structuralist Roland Barthes, fragmentation gives a more comprehensive insight by offering more than one point of view in terms of a certain issue. Barthes states that the author of such a literary work is no longer the voice of authority or the one in control. He announces “the death of the author” and “the birth of the reader” as various interpretations of the same work could be reached by different readers [6]. In other words, there is no one imposed truth but rather a multiplicity of suggested truths that are formed due to the numerous narrative voices in a novel and the diverse interpretations of different recipients of the same work of art.

That is why the actual reading of the story had been stressed time and again to the subjects within their selection stage. Nonetheless, all of the subjects in
our first introductory session gave various excuses for not having been able to read the assigned material. Setbacks had not ceased to exist at that point, which eventually led to the complete withdrawal of the three females in the second session! This was the critical phase of the case study since half of the subjects representing a particular gender simply stopped attending the scheduled sessions. According to the female subjects, various social obligations hindered their continuation in this case study since they had not sufficient time for adequate reading. The principle of withdrawal had been expected, however, not in such a high percentage.

The researchers, at this stage, were left with no option except to fuse the remaining three male subjects with the passion of learning literature, to make them aware of this opportunity which allowed them the exposure to such a work and to make them understand that the success of this case study really depended on their devotion, commitment, contribution and interaction.

In other terms, embarking on such a project may seem challenging to students. The reading of such a literary text may appear to be such an ordeal to some especially the weak ones. But here lays the proper choice of the text itself. Literature becomes both interesting and engaging when it mutually delights and instructs. In addition to the reasons mentioned above, “The Story of William Wilson” had been chosen for this case study because the story is not typically traditional and, therefore, unpredictable.

“The Story of William Wilson” suggests a mysterious mood in light of the actions that move quickly within William’s environment. Moreover, the story introduces a number of ambiguities. As a result, after the reading of the assigned pages, the subjects were presented with a number of critical questions at the beginning of each session, the aim of which were to trigger their creative thinking and sharpen their critical perspectives. Four challenging questions were focused upon, each per week. Here are the questions stated below in chronological order:

- What is the significance of the name of William Wilson?
- What is the influence of William on his peers?
- How could the behavior of William be explained?
- In your view, how could the presence of another William be justified?

Interestingly enough, not all of the answers were usually correct and sensible by all of the remaining subjects, who attempted to visualize with their minds’ eyes the developments of William’s endeavors in light of their own personal experiences of childhood and early adulthood and based upon their previous educational knowledge in literary theory and criticism. For instance, the subjects agreed that there must be a kind of mental telepathy between the two Williams, that peer competition is inevitable and that each of the two Williams may represent a different face of the same coin.

Some of the subjects’ justification and commentaries were impressive. They exemplified the ability to suspend disbelief by stretching their imagination. In actuality, at the time that “The Story of William Wilson” may be difficult to read even for some Westerners, the remaining three subjects proved to play a key role in the understanding and appreciation of this literary work.

**The Various Factors of the Case Study:** Based upon this case study, there are a number of essential factors that are to be properly employed in order to attain the sought didactic benefit for students as well as to reinforce their centrality. The first factor is the instructor. The approach of the instructor within the lecture hall about a certain theory, literary work, or subject at large should be inviting, encouraging and above all understanding. This may be endorsed as the instructor would initially welcome all points of view in a neutral manner presented by his / her students of all levels.

At a second stage, the instructor may try with all the students to find suitable justifications for their reflections based on their reading of the primary source. This way, students of far-fetched ideas or of mediocre performance could be put on the right track rather than to be left with hesitation, uncertainty, shyness and basically reticence or even confusion. Only then, all students would begin to satisfactorily engage themselves with the text leading to their proper interaction with not only their instructor but also among their peers. This, in its turn, will definitely pave the way to a brainstorming kind of session.

The second factor is the selected text for examination. The work ought to be interesting to students. The issue of interest is very crucial. Students will start to originate an interest in a particular work if there is a cause that is relevant to their own reality, which will draw them to the work itself. This cause may be, for example, psychological, social, political, economical, or humanitarian at large.

The third factor is the student himself / herself. Despite the fact that there were challenges at the beginning of this case study pertaining to the reaction of the subjects regarding the non-traditional story, yet there had always been faith in students in general, who proved
that with sincere obligation, their worthy engagement and contribution can be attained in a proper environment that secures the first and second factors mentioned earlier.

**Findings:** Therefore, in order to support and further promote students’ centrality, it is recommended to specify approximately 30 percent of students’ overall assessment for in-class participation as well as critical and original thinking in both our state and private universities. This way, students will gradually become committed by coming to class more prepared than before since a considerable percentage of their total average is determined by their in-class performance. This, in its turn, will turn them into better active participants in every course, which would inevitable highlight their centrality and increase their pedagogic benefit as a whole.

**REFERENCES**