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Critical Thinking through Literature: A Dialogue Teaching Model

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CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH LITERATURE:
A DIALOGUE TEACHING MODEL

A Thesis Presented

by

William H. Hayes

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research
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for the degree of

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Critical and Creative Thinking Program

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To my children
Kristin, Lauren and Erin
With love

ABSTRACT

CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH LITERATURE:

A DIALOGUE TEACHING MODEL

SEPTEMBER 1990

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Many traditional approaches to teaching literature depend on lecturing and asking pointed or leading questions which require correct answers. Though such lessons have their value, they do not engage students in earnest and thoughtful discussions of literature. Such methods may be useful for reviewing material, but they are not sufficient to foster critical thinking.

The Dialogue Teaching Model evolves in eight phases. It allows students to respond to literature at their own level of understanding by giving students the opportunity to interpret readings on their own. Using a dialogue approach, the teacher has students make judgments or decisions about their reading which they must explain and defend during a class discussion. The discussion allows students to test the soundness of their decisions by comparing their arguments to those of others. In a later phase of the lesson, students reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their interpretations. The teacher facilitates the learning process by guiding the discussion and by helping students examine their own thinking. After the dialogue has been completed, students may

maintain or revise their initial decisions, depending on how well they were able to defend their positions.

Evaluation is an ongoing process in the Dialogue Teaching Model, since the teacher observes and assesses students during the dialogue and reflection phases of the lesson. Students also demonstrate their knowledge and improve their skills through writing and/or speaking assignments at the end of the lesson. Evaluation is viewed as part of the learning process and is not limited to a testing procedure.

The Dialogue Teaching Model gives students the opportunity to become more active learners. By considering a number of different viewpoints, students can develop a deeper understanding of both literature and critical thinking. Students are not told what to think; they decide for themselves through discourse and reflection. In the process of teaching literature and critical thinking, the Dialogue Teaching Model encourages effective speech, attentive listening, improved writing skills, and autonomy of thought.

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CHAPTER I

CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the concepts and principles which underlie the Dialogue Teaching Model. The discussion will consider a working definition of critical thinking, the compatibility of literature and critical thinking instruction, and the use of dialogue as the teaching method of choice. Later chapters will attempt to give the reader a sense of how an actual lesson might work, as well as providing a detailed explanation of the model, its phases and variations. In the final chapter, suggestions will be provided for teachers who want to get started using dialogue as a method of teaching critical thinking through literature.

Defining Critical Thinking

Robert Ennis has defined critical thinking as "reasonable and reflective thinking which is focused on deciding what to believe or do" (Ennis 1985, 46). There is more to this simple definition than meets the eye. In the course of our everyday lives we have to make decisions which affect ourselves and others. Our decisions range from such mundane tasks as deciding which products we should buy, to such important issues as which candidate we should support in an upcoming presidential election. We must make decisions when we analyze and evaluate as well. Problem solving requires decisions

as to what courses of action could be taken to reach a solution? Judging the strength of different story interpretations in an English class requires decisions as well. Decisions must be made when estimating the merits of an argument, determining what is moral or immoral, or in judging what is true or false in what we read, see, or hear. All of these tasks center on making decisions, but making decisions in and of itself does not constitute what Ennis defines as critical thinking.

Critical thinking also means making intelligent decisions about what to believe or do through "reasonable and reflective" thinking. Critical thinking means being able to skillfully draw inferences, make comparisons, determine causes and effects, recognize the impact frame-of-reference has on judgment, judge the reliability of sources, spot over-generalizations, distinguish between facts and opinions, and employ numerous other abilities (See Appendix for a modified and more complete listing).

Making good decisions, then, means being reasonable and thoughtful about what to "believe" or "do." Making decisions also requires critical dispositions or attitudes (Ennis 1985, 46). Critical attitudes are just as important as critical thinking abilities, perhaps more important. Critical dispositions make it possible to employ other abilities. Developing the critical attitude to suspend judgment until sufficient information is available, for example, makes more thoughtful, knowledgeable, and thorough decisions possible. This is to say, for instance, that making snap judgments is poor critical thinking, no matter how skillfully other abilities may be employed.

Ennis lists thirteen such dispositions as goals for a critical thinking curriculum (Ennis 1985, 46):

1. Seek a clear statement of the thesis or question.
2. Seek reasons.
3. Try to be well-informed.
4. Use credible sources and mention them.
5. Take into account the total situation.
6. Try to remain relevant to the main point.
7. Keep in mind the original and/or basic concern.
8. Look for alternatives.
9. Be openminded.
10. Take a position (and change a position) when evidence and reasons are sufficient to do so.
11. Seek as much precision as the subject permits.
12. Deal in an orderly manner with the parts of a complex whole.
13. Be sensitive to the feelings, level of knowledge, and degree of sophistication of others.

Literature Study and Critical Thinking Compatibility

Let us consider how these critical thinking dispositions and abilities come into play in a literature class. When students read literature in the English classroom, they must continually make intelligent decisions. For example, students must make judgments about character motivation, an author's intent, the tone of a story, the nature of a fictional conflict, or any values expressed through a story or poem. As students read a story they often must decide where the plot is going, what the significance of a symbol is, or what the importance of a character or event is to the story as a

whole. These and numerous other significant decisions have an impact on the basic concerns of a literature class: student comprehension and interpretation.

Literature study can be an effective means of teaching critical thinking. Understanding literature requires intelligent judgments and decisions based upon reasonable and reflective thought. To make such judgments students must become familiar with how literature works. The more students learn about various writing techniques and forms, the better they become at comprehending, interpreting, and judging the quality of the writing.

The student who is familiar with irony, for example, can most likely comprehend and interpret a story which employs a subtle irony better than a student who has little understanding of irony. Examining how a surprise ending is developed in a short story, for example, helps students to grasp how such an ending works. Students who develop an interest in mystery stories sometimes learn to predict outcomes with facility. On the writing end, it would be fair to say that not many English teachers have escaped the story which ends with the narrator emerging from a dream? Indeed, research shows that learning about the structural qualities of stories improves both reading comprehension and the ability to write stories (Peterson 1986, 22).

Teaching literature, then, means teaching a body of knowledge. Students can become familiar with how literature works. When students have an understanding of literature, they have a foundation from which to make decisions about what they are reading;

they can recognize and decide, for example, where the story is going, how it is developing, and how well it is being played out.

Developing better critical thinking dispositions and abilities is also facilitated by an adequate foundation of knowledge. As students begin to develop a critical thinking vocabulary, their perceptions become sharper (Costa 1987, 30). For example, the student who is able to appropriately label a statement as an over-generalization, demonstrates an understanding of that concept and an ability to recognize and label a thinking behavior. This is why some teachers of critical thinking encourage the labeling of student thinking behaviors during class activities and discussions (Costa, 1984, 61). Labeling can also make students more aware of their own cognitive processes: "I think I've been overgeneralizing." In this way, students are encouraged to think about their own thinking, a process Costa and Marzano call metacognition (1987, 32). It is reasonable to say that applying labels that name processes is helpful since it increases awareness and understanding.

Our central challenge as English teachers is to find ways to help students become better critical thinkers through literature instruction. Critical thinking abilities and dispositions are integral to the English instruction. In order for students in an English class to make intelligent judgments and decisions concerning their reading, they need to clarify, recognize evidence, set aside assumptions, organize thoughts, and draw conclusions. To express themselves effectively through the spoken and written word, they must employ these same skills. For this reason, critical thinking

and English skills can be viewed as intimately linked. Students should learn to understand and evaluate the thoughts of others as well as develop and express their own ideas.

Since the study of literature requires students to comprehend and interpret what they read, it can be a means of revealing students' reasoning processes. When students voice an opinion about what motivated a character to act in a certain way, they can be asked to explain their reasoning. When students make their reasoning explicit, it can then be scrutinized through questioning and analysis. Considering a character's motivation raises questions about cause and effect. Is the motivation determined by students the real motivation behind the character's behavior? Is it the most important cause for a given effect or just the most obvious cause? Are there any other causes affecting the character's behavior?

Discussion about a novel such as Les Misérables by Victor Hugo illustrates how critical thinking and literature study can dovetail. When students discuss Jean Valjean's motivation for stealing a loaf of bread, they think it obvious that he was motivated by concern for his starving family. Why was his family in such sorry condition? Did Valjean have other alternatives? What does this tell the reader about the social conditions and attitudes which contributed to Valjean's crime? Such questions also lead to a discussion of the social and moral issues.

Students taking part in such a discussion can learn to observe and evaluate their own lines of reasoning when confronted by opinions different from their own. By paraphrasing student answers,

the teacher can clarify and help make students better listeners and better examiners of their own thinking and that of others. By labeling and explaining the kinds of thinking students employ, and by generalizing or naming causes and effects, students can become more aware of important concepts and patterns of reasoning. Asking students to rephrase explanations or to paraphrase helps them to reexamine statements, to identify assumptions, and to self-correct (Costa 1984, 61).

Such a scrutiny of reasoning focuses on critical thinking skills, but it also helps students to learn about character development. In the Valjean example, for instance, students can learn how characterization affects the story as a whole. By being asked to support judgments about characters, students can learn how characters develop.

In other words, students must look to the evidence in the story that the author develops to create perceptions of a character. At an even higher level, students can begin to make critical estimations about how well an author has developed a character. Would this character really act this way in this situation? While learning to be better thinkers, students learn that authors should make their characters believable. Finally, asking students to explain their reasoning develops good critical thinking attitudes. Students learn through experience that they must be able to adequately support their interpretations. Students begin to develop an important critical disposition: it is not enough to state a point of view, since judgments made about a story must be supported with reasons and evidence.

Class discussions centered on literature can improve student writing as well. It has also been found that students of all ages acquire rhetorical knowledge from their reading; reading experience helps writing performance, and the reverse is also true (Peterson 1986, 21, 22). These findings make good sense. If students can recognize satire in the writing of others, creating their own satire certainly becomes a better possibility. Students can imitate what they learn from reading and they can apply what they know about writing to their reading. While the study of literature may not be the only way to teach students how to write, literature studies can benefit writing ability.

In summary, studying literature can help students develop better critical thinking abilities and dispositions. Literature studies can also help students to become better critical listeners and speakers. Finally, the study of literature can help to expand students' rhetorical knowledge and writing abilities.

For the teacher of literature, the task is to develop lessons which will meet the objectives of the English literature class and effectively incorporate teaching thinking skills and dispositions. The study of the writing/composing process offers some insights on how classroom dialogue can be used to expand students' knowledge and understanding of both literature and thinking skills.

Learning Through Dialogue

Insights into the importance of dialogue to learning do not come from observing the benefits of spoken discourse alone. They also come from reading about ideas concerning the nature of the writing process. Writing teachers such as Anne Berthoff and Peter Elbow view writing as a dialectic or dialogic activity. In other words, writers discover what they want to say through an inner dialogue through which they are able to consider multiple viewpoints as they write. An historian who is writing a history of some famous event, for example, might have an inner dialogue considering what he has learned through formal education, current research, and personal reflection. Through such a process the writer develops and refines his own ideas and understanding of history. Writing in this sense is a learning process. In this process, writers use their knowledge and thinking skills to grow intellectually and stylistically.

Anne Berthoff observes that whenever we try to make sense of the world, we are composing (Berthoff 1982, 11). When we are puzzled or mistaken and come to see something for what it actually is, we are composing. When we come to incorrect or unsatisfactory identifications or assessments and we correct these or give them up for better ones, we are composing. Writing can be considered a composing process if it encompasses responding to the world, coming to conclusions, and reassessing and revising those conclusions. Writing requires writers to think about their thinking and to think about the language they use to express their thinking, but this composing process depends on dialogue.

Berthoff describes the analytical writing process as an "inner dialogue." When writers write and revise what has been written, a dialectic or inner discussion occurs as the writer considers what has been said and what was intended (Berthoff 1982, 154-155). In other words, writers must assess what they say from two different perspectives, what they intended to say and what they have actually said. To do this writers must also consider their audience and how they might respond to the writing. Writers must also consider whether or not what they have said reflects the truth. All of these processes, seem to involve some kind of an inner dialectic which takes different viewpoints into consideration.

A similar view of writing is expressed by Peter Elbow. Elbow's suggestions to facilitate the writing process involve the idea that we often do not know what we want to say until we say it. Through the process of producing and assessing our thoughts and their relationship to each other, through repeated writing and revising, we discover what we want to say. Elbow believes that it is the reassessing which occurs during this process that makes the development of new understanding possible. By recognizing relationships and resolving problems in the writing, writers are able to arrive at a new or better understanding of their subject (Elbow 1973, 22-25).

Intelligent thinking is dialectic or dialogic in that it requires flexibility and a willingness to explore different thoughts with an open mind; otherwise, it is too easy to close ourselves off to new considerations (Elbow 1973, 175). Like Berthoff, Elbow sees that writing can be learning process through which writers expand

their knowledge and understanding through an inner dialogue. Cognitive research seems to support such ideas by indicating that learning is not enhanced by rote repetition of new information, but by efforts at understanding new data through elaboration. This process relates what is new to that which the learner already knows (Howard 1983, 166-169).

The ideas of Berthoff and Elbow should perhaps be qualified. The development of new understandings is certainly not characteristic of all types of writing. Creative writing, for example, has a different focus from analytical writing. Creative writing focuses on personal expression through a marriage of form and content. It is writing for the sake of artistic expression. However, it can be reasonably argued that we do have dialogic learning experiences like those described by Berthoff and Elbow through the practice of analytical writing. The Dialogue Teaching Model utilizes a similar type of dialogic learning. Students involved in dialogue activities can arrive at new understandings of a subject through discourse.

One difficulty with the writing process is that the inner dialogue is limited to one person's perspective, that of the writer. Peter Elbow argues that true composing is dialectical, but conversation is a more natural dialectic form than writing. Conversation, by its very nature, involves an exchange of viewpoints through a give-and-take process (Elbow 1973, 48-51). Writers, on the other hand, must train themselves to view their subject from different perspectives. Conversation has the advantage of bringing a number of different viewpoints together naturally. Socratic

Dialogue, for example, shows the power of this process. Dialogue offers us the opportunity to go beyond the confines of our own experience and knowledge. The Dialogue Teaching Model is an effort to capitalize on the power of dialogue as a pedagogical method.

In 1854, teacher, writer, and theologian John Henry Newman described the nature of a university as a place "for the communication and circulation of thought by means of personal intercourse" (Roe 1947, 181). Newman considered discourse so important to learning that he once said that if he were given the choice to pursue one or the other, social discourse or literary pursuits, he would choose the former (Roe, 157). Over a century later, a free exchange of ideas and viewpoints through dialogue remains an effective means of intellectual and personal growth. The Dialogue Teaching Model speaks to the preservation of discourse as a means of learning.

Characteristics of the Dialogue Teaching Model

The concept of learning through conversation is central to the Dialogue Teaching Model presented here. Teaching literature through dialogue activities means putting students through a process consisting of five basic steps: (1) getting students to respond to their reading in some significant open-ended way, (2) comparing their reasoning to that of others, (3) reflecting on their own reasoning after considering what others have said, (4) revising or

maintaining their responses in the light of other viewpoints, and
(5) demonstrating their understanding of a literary piece through a
written or oral assignment.

The Dialogue Teaching Model also has a number of
characteristics which make it compatible with both critical thinking
and literature study. The characteristics explained below are
presented as general theoretical objectives.

Open-ended response. Dialogue activities should begin with an
open-ended question or task. The response should not require a
"right" answer. Robert Sternberg argues that students should be
given questions which do not have a single right answer, because
real life problems are not usually neatly structured and objectively
scorable (Sternberg 1985, 278-279). This argument is particularly
applicable to the humanities. Students should be given experience
dealing with questions other than those which often appear on a
multiple choice or fill-in tests. If they are to learn how to
reason, students should be given questions which require them to
make decisions and judgments based on reasons they can articulate
and defend.

More recently, Sternberg, along with Louis Spear, has
identified three common teaching styles (Sternberg 1987, 33). The
didactic style describes the presentation of information to
establish a base of knowledge. A second method, fact-based
questioning, involves asking questions about material which students
have already learned. This method is useful to review and reinforce

material which has been previously studied. A third method, the dialogic style, involves thinking-based questioning. Such questioning is usually open-ended and students must decide on an answer based on their best reasoning. Of these three methods, dialogic teaching does the most to stimulate critical thinking. To answer questions which demand reasoned judgments or decisions requires critical thought. The other two styles do have their value and their place in teaching, but the dialogic style is valuable for engaging students in the practice of critical thinking.

Richard Paul is a supporter of a dialogic method of teaching. Dialectical knowledge, he argues, enhances learning by confronting students with issues for which different points of view can be developed. This is not to be confused with an "anything goes" approach in which all opinions are assumed equal. A dialectical approach seeks reasonable judgments based on critical thinking principles (Paul 1984, 13). Paul also argues that real-life decisions require practice in dialectic or dialogic reasoning. In other words, students must learn to make decisions which involve contradictory points of view through rational forms of discussion, just as they must in the real world. Barry Byer further supports this notion of dialogic teaching when he describes critical thinking as an awareness of the need to evaluate information, a willingness to test different opinions, and a desire to give a fair consideration of different viewpoints (Byer 1985, 271).

In dialogue activities, the aim of the lesson should be to stimulate reading interpretations. These can then be discussed,

assessed, and revised. The search for knowledge begins, rather than ends, when students are asked to make a reasoned judgment.

Metacognition. Dialogue activities should include the improvement of thinking skills and dispositions. During such a lesson, student thinking processes and attitudes should be explored. When students describe and discuss the reasoning which underlies their response to a reading, the teacher guides the discussion comments and questions.

If a student makes an inference, for example, the teacher would label it as such and ask the student on what basis the inference was made. The inference could then be assessed by further questions. "Does everyone understand how Sally made this inference? By labeling mental processes, the teacher can help students better understand new concepts (Costa 1984, 61). Students can also learn to observe their own thinking, "I'm not sure that there is enough evidence to support my conclusion." Costa and Marzano call such a process metacognition (1987, 32).

The teacher should also ask students to clarify their positions or to paraphrase what someone else has said. Clarifying helps students to look at their own thinking, identify errors, and make corrections on their own by rephrasing and reconsidering their thoughts. Such a practice is especially desirable in the English classroom because it helps students to think and speak extemporaneously. Paraphrasing makes students better listeners and better critics of their own thoughts. To do a competent job of

paraphrasing, students must listen well (Costa 1984, 61). Listening skills too have an important place in both the English and critical thinking curriculum.

How the discussion is guided can also be beneficial to students. The teacher can reinforce good critical thinking attitudes by making thoughtful statements about what is occurring in a discussion.

"Is that a credible source you are using?"

"I think we are getting off the subject now. Let's keep the discussion relevant to the main point here."

"It's always a good idea to look for alternatives instead of being narrow minded."

"During this part of the lesson you are to reassess your reasoning by comparing it to what you've been hearing from your classmates."

These questions are based on several of Ennis's thirteen critical dispositions (Ennis 1985, 46). A teacher who is cognizant of Ennis's thirteen critical thinking dispositions (see page 3) can make every discussion an opportunity to teach both productive attitudes and an exacting approach to analysis.

By guiding, questioning, labeling, and asking students to clarify and paraphrase during class discussions, the teacher can help students to become better listeners, speakers, and critical thinkers.

Stories can be used to teach students about specific thinking skills. A lesson on literary point-of-view, for example,

becomes a lesson on the effect frame-of-reference has on the someone's interpretation of events and ideas. This concept then reappears throughout the school year. Another example of teaching critical thinking through literature might be a lesson on plot design or character motivation. These subjects can be used to teach students about cause and effect. An array of thinking skills and dispositions can be selected, introduced, refined, and reinforced in this way. Sometimes a story has to be taught as part of an English curriculum, but the teacher cannot find any evident potential critical thinking objectives. This does not mean that the lesson cannot be used to improve student thinking and their knowledge of critical thinking. Class discussions can be used do this.

Class discussions in dialogue activities offer many spontaneous opportunities for teaching thinking skills. The teacher should label, explain, and question student thinking processes. "Karen is generalizing. Is there enough evidence to support the conclusion that all the characters are equally responsible?" After some discussion, the teacher might say, "Is there reason to believe that Karen's generalization should be qualified? We might make the statement less general and more accurate by changing the wording. Any suggestions?"

Rational change. Dialogue activities should allow students to make a rational change in their position. In other words, students should be open to new information which may help them to make better judgments and decisions (Ennis, 1985, 46). Specific differences in judgment should be discovered and explored. If students find that

they have made mistakes in judgment, they can recognize these and make intelligent changes. A student, for example, might make a decision in favor of a character's actions in a story. Perhaps the character lied. This student may not, however, have considered alternative choices which the character may have had. When better alternatives are offered in a class discussion, students who did not consider such possibilities can learn something about both literature and critical thinking: for instance, the characters, may have been narrow in their problem solving approach. A solution should not be selected solely because it is the most obvious. Considering alternatives improves the chances of arriving at better solutions.

Reflection. Dialogue activities should require students to reflect on their own performance. For example, a student might describe what he or she had learned from a lesson by writing a journal entry: "Today I found out that people should use their imaginations when they make a choice by considering alternatives. Tommy, a character in this week's short story reading, did not do this, and neither did I. Tommy had a better choice than lying; he simply did not stop to consider his alternatives. I thought he made a good decision, but after listening to the ideas of some other kids, I realized that he had better alternatives." Entries like this indicate that students have learned to look at their own thinking, the character's thinking, and the thinking of their classmates. Journal keeping allows students the opportunity to compare changes in perceptions by "revisiting" the decisions they have made (Costa 1984, 61).

The teacher observing such an entry can see that students have learned something about the character in the story and about making choices. The teacher is rewarded by reading such entries, knowing that this student has grown in knowledge and understanding as a result of the lesson. Teachers also discover what students have specifically learned. Perhaps more importantly, the teacher can also discover which students gained little or nothing from the lesson.

Active learning. Dialogue activities should motivate students by design. The response phase of the lesson should require students to make a decision about some questionable aspect(s) of a reading. Students know that there is no right or wrong answer, and they usually look forward to actively expressing and defending their judgments. Even students who may not engage in the discussion get involved as they mentally compare other responses as different viewpoints are explained and defended.

Judging from experience, most of us would probably agree that lessons which enable students to be active rather than passive learners are the most effective. Students who invest themselves in some kind of a class project, for example, usually develop some expertise which they are more than happy to share. Cognitive research also indicates that active learning is preferable to passive (Howard, 1983, 6). This only makes sense. Fact-based questioning, for instance, leads to quick conclusions by those who know the answers. These are appropriate for reviewing information perhaps, but didactic teaching like this puts the teacher in the

more active role. Consequently, students play the more passive receptor role (Sternberg 1987, 33). The dialectic or dialogic style characterized in the Dialogue Teaching Model presented in this paper gives students a more active role in their learning.

Elaboration. Dialogue activities engage students in making judgments and decisions, explaining and defending these, and learning through the group discussion and personal reflection which follow. Students must listen, speak, assess, and reassess their point of view during dialogue activities. Cognitive researchers believe that such active "elaborative rehearsal" is the most effective approach to learning (Howard 1983, 149-155). Elaborative rehearsal "processes" information more deeply by relating new information to what is already known. In the case of dialogue activities, students learn to make better judgments about their readings by relating their knowledge of literature and critical thinking to the knowledge of others. Students are like chess players who learn new moves and strategies as they play a friendly game against different players of varying knowledge and skill. Through such practice, players expand their own knowledge and skills. In a similar fashion, dialogue activities allow students to expand their knowledge and skills.

Schemata development. Modern cognitive schema theory holds that people develop a large number of mental schemata or models of knowledge in their long-term memories. These models give people a

generalized knowledge of the world (Howard 1983, 313-315). For example, when customers enter a restaurant, they know generally what to expect. Although each individual restaurant may be different, certain aspects about certain types can be generalized. Customers know, for example, that they can expect tables, chairs, waiters or waitresses, and menus in a certain type of establishment. They also know that they can select a meal and that they must pay for it. Such innumerable schemata or models of the world allow us to comprehend and function in it. New experiences add to the complexity of such schemata.

In the world of literature study, readers can develop a knowledge of a number of schemata, for literature, too, has a schemata of its own. For example, experienced readers learn what to expect from a story or a poem, such as a plot or a rhyme scheme. As the complexity and difficulty of the reading increases, students can develop new and more developed schemata. For example, students might develop a knowledge of how writers can use a stream of consciousness as a writing technique. Studies have shown that students do improve in both writing ability and reading comprehension when the structural qualities of stories are studied (Peterson 1986, 22). Reading research shows that schemata help people to develop a mental context for finding meaning. Learning involves building a repertoire of useful schemata for understanding new information. Widening experience probably produces more flexible models (Berger and Robinson 1982, 24).

Dialogue activities should facilitate the development of literary schemata. As students observe how others comprehend and

interpret a reading, students broaden their knowledge and increase their own repertoire of schemata. For instance, when students realize that their own response to a poem was too literal, they begin to see the difference between how they interpreted the poem and how others did. Students can begin to recognize that certain poems utilize metaphor or simile or other figures of speech. With practice students can develop more flexible models which can hopefully help them to better recognize and understand future readings. As a teaching year progresses, students should be able to demonstrate their growing knowledge base by expressing their own observations about character, motivation, metaphor, symbolism, theme, atmosphere, and the like.

Summary

The Dialogue Teaching Model provides a method of teaching literature with critical thinking skills and dispositions in a natural way. Using a dialectic or dialogic approach, the teacher has students make judgments or decisions about their reading which must be explained and defended during a class discussion. The discussion is a way for students to test the soundness of their decisions by comparing their reasoning to the reasoning of others. The teacher facilitates the learning process by guiding the discussion and by helping students to think about their thinking. Students are provided an opportunity to reflect and to arrive at their own final judgments after discussion ends. Students may maintain their initial response, or they may revise it because of

what they learned from the class discussion. Finally, students are given an opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned through writing, speaking or other evaluation activities.

This chapter has provided an overview of the Dialogue Teaching Model and the principles which underlie it. The chapters which follow will develop and describe specific examples of the model, explain its phases in detail, and make suggestions for its successful employment in the classroom.

C H A P T E R I I
THE DIALOGUE TEACHING MODEL: A LESSON

Introduction

The Dialogue Teaching Model is made up of several steps. The lesson begins when students are given the opportunity to express their interpretations of a reading assignment and offer their supporting arguments. In the next phase of the lesson students examine a number of viewpoints different from their own. This is followed by a period of reflection, during which students consider these differences and reassess their original conclusions. From this process students can learn to improve their own thinking skills and improve their basic English skills as well. For instance, students who read a poem at a literal level can discover figurative meanings through an examination of the ideas explored during a class dialogue.

With continual practice, students can improve their own abilities to think and read at higher levels as they actively observe their own ways of reasoning in juxtaposition to the reasoning of their peers and the teacher. This chapter will describe a poetry lesson to give the reader a sense of the Dialogue Teaching Model before it is presented in more depth in Chapter III.

Poetry Lesson

The poem to be read is entitled "George Gray" by Edgar Lee Masters (1980, 438), a reading which expresses thoughts about life through symbolism, metaphor, and personification. The students are told that the poem which they are about to read is an epitaph by Edgar Lee Masters from the Spoon River Anthology. The term "epitaph" is also clearly defined, especially in terms of the purposes for which an epitaph might be employed, such as an expression of the deceased's legacy or philosophy of life.

George Gray

I have studied many times
The marble which was chisled for me -
A boat with furled sail at rest in the harbor.
In truth it pictures not my destination
But my life.
For love was offered me
And I shrank from its disillusionment;
Sorrow knocked at my door, but I was afraid;
Ambition called to me, but I dreaded the chances.
Yet all the while I hungered for meaning in my life.
And now I know that we must lift the sail
And catch the winds of destiny
Wherever they drive the boat.
To put meaning in one's life may end in madness,
But life without meaning is the torture
Of restlessness and vague desire -
It is a boat longing for the sea and yet afraid.

by Edgar Lee Masters

We know from experience that a number of ninth grade college preparatory students will have some difficulty comprehending the figurative language in the above poem. Some will find it difficult to fully understand the ideas the author is trying to communicate.

Many will also have difficulty perceiving how these ideas are expressed and unified in the poem.

The textbooks in which such poems appear contain questions that lead the reader to thoughts which are not the reader's own thoughts. A question on symbolism, for example, lets readers know that the boat in the poem is symbolic, and students are asked to explain that symbolism. But this question influences the students' interpretations. Students who did not interpret any use of symbolism in the poem are led by an authoritative source. In such cases, students must yield to the textbook's interpretation to get a correct answer.

The problem with this approach is that it does not allow students to think for themselves. It is better to allow students to interpret the poem as they see it - with as little outside influence as possible. If students have difficulty seeing symbolism in the poem, let their response reveal this. The goal should be to allow students to make their own decisions and to respect these. In a subsequent dialogue, the teacher can find out what different students are thinking and how they are interpreting the poem. Answering a question which directly leads to a symbolic or other specified interpretation does not foster independent thought. Instead of being told what to think, students should judge for themselves the weaknesses and strengths of their conclusions. They should also be provided the opportunity to develop a deeper level of understanding. The Dialogue Teaching Model is designed to generate such a process, as the following lesson description illustrates.

The lesson opens. The students are told to read the poem as many times as they like until they get an impression of the poem's meaning. Once students are ready, they are asked to respond to the poem in the following manner:

Pretend that you are Edgar Lee Masters, the author of "George Gray." You are composing a letter to a friend describing the idea you have for this very poem. You have not yet written the poem, you are thinking about how you might write it and what thoughts about life you want the poem to express. Describe your ideas as if you were Edgar Lee Masters writing to his friend. Reread the poem as many times as you must to do this.

There are a number of benefits to this approach. Having students role-play the author creates somewhat of a challenge. More importantly, the aim of the response assignment is to get students to think like the author and go beyond their own egocentric boundaries (Paul 1984, 12). Students are, in this way, encouraged to go beyond a personal, narrow view which might be elicited by asking an egocentric question such as "What do you think the poem is about?" When the class discussion begins, the focus will be on what students think the author was trying to communicate in the poem, and they will have to support their conclusions.

This response assignment is also open-ended, since each student may respond without being overly concerned about giving a "right" or "wrong" answer. They are being asked to make a reasoned judgment which they can later explain and defend. Students should be told not to worry about being right or wrong, but to carefully read the poem, follow directions

precisely, use their imaginations, and develop the most reasonable response they can. Students must then defend their response by supporting their arguments with references to the text of the poem.

By asking for a written response students are given time to reflect on the poem. By the time the discussion begins, students will have thought about the poem and made some decisions concerning the intent of the author.

When students have finished writing their responses, they will have already made some judgments and reached some conclusions. The question then becomes one of how well reasoned these judgments and conclusions are. The class discussion will emerge from this preparation. Students like to express their personal views. From their responses and the ensuing discussion, observations can be made concerning how well different students comprehended and interpreted the poem.

After the students have finished writing their responses, they are instructed to write a short explanation of the reasoning they used to come up with their responses. In other words, they must explain why they said what they said. Such explanation makes the reasoning behind the responses explicit. The students' lines of reasoning can thus be observed.

Finally, students must limit their responses so that these can be recorded on the blackboard. The students first narrow their responses to a basic theme. Then the different responses are juxtaposed and compared. During this comparison,

students get a chance to hear how other students have responded and reasoned out their responses. After a full discussion, students are asked to decide which of the responses seem in line with what the author might have said.

A discussion scenario. The focus of the lesson now takes a turn. Students are asked to listen to the reasoning of other students, and they are asked to consider what everyone has to say before they finally assess the relative strength of responses and explanations. Students are told that this is the part of the lesson where they can come to a fuller understanding of the poem - if they carefully listen and weigh what others have to say during the discussion.

One student, Mary, has responded that the purpose of the poem is to describe a man who was in love, but he was afraid he would get hurt so he kept to himself and lived a very lonely life as a result. Mary is asked to support her opinion with evidence from the poem. To do so, she cites lines from the poem to support her point.

The teacher then asks, "Is that it? Or is there more to be said about the poem?" Other students say that this is what part of the poem is about, but it does not explain the whole poem. The teacher answers, "Let's consider the whole poem."

Another student, Johnny, asks, "What about the boat which stays in the harbor? What does that have to do with love?" The teacher directs the question to Mary. She cannot

answer this question, and the teacher realizes that she probably has not yet made the connection between the boat and George Gray's life. The teacher tells her to think about Johnny's question. Mary has focused on one part of the poem, but she has not seen the total picture. But what about Johnny, does he realize that the boat has symbolic value?

The teacher then turns to Johnny. "Do you agree with Mary that the poem does have something to do with love?"

"Yes," replies Johnny, "but the poem is about more than love. George was a sailor who was afraid to leave the harbor. He kept his sailboat in the harbor instead of getting out on the ocean. He wishes he had taken it out, but he was too scared." The teacher observes that Johnny is interpreting at a literal level and has not yet made the figurative connections.

Can anyone respond to what Johnny has just said? Tom raises his hand to respond. "I think Johnny is right because the poem also says that he was afraid to take chances even though he had some ambition. He wanted to sail out on the ocean, but he was afraid to try."

"Where does it mention ambition?" asks the teacher. Johnny cites lines from the poem. "Interesting," the teacher responds.

The teacher sees other hands raised. It has become evident that the students who have answered so far have not looked at the poem in total, but have isolated the parts they understand. The teacher wants them to realize that they must consider all that the poem expresses, not just isolated parts.

The teacher interjects, "So far we have discussed parts of the poem, and students have given some reasonable opinions and supported their opinions with lines from the poem. This is all very good. We've considered parts of the poem, but we don't seem to be considering it as a whole. How do all these parts fit together? To understand a poem, all the thoughts in the poem must be observed. I'd like everyone, even those who think they've got it all figured out, to read the poem once more and try to consider all the poet's thoughts and how they might be related to each other. The teacher waits patiently until everyone is finished.

Helen is obviously ready to make a statement. She claims that the boat in the poem is not a real boat. "What makes you say that?" questions the teacher. She explains that the boat is "chisled in marble" and that it represents George Gray's life.

The teacher responds by saying, "That's interesting, can anyone else comment on this idea that the boat in the harbor is not a real boat." Several students now want to respond. Brian claims that the boat is carved into a tombstone. The pieces of the puzzle are beginning to fit.

The teacher responds by telling the class that they have reached the point where another reading of the poem should be helpful. He reminds the students to think about what has been said and to look at the poem in its totality.

After this final reading, students continue to discuss other responses on the blackboard which they think are the most

reasonable explanations of the author's intent. All the responses have been covered by the time the bell rings. Some students ask the teacher to explain the poem to them. These students are told that they have heard enough and that they will have to come to their own decision based on what has been said: "Think about it tonight and we'll finish discussing it tomorrow." Only after they have made their decisions, will the teacher's interpretation be revealed. This approach keeps student curiosity alive and allows students to make up their own minds.

The next day the discussion concludes and the teacher asks the students to write an entry in their journal-notebooks. They are to state their initial interpretation of the poem and explain why they did or did not change their minds during the course of discussion. They are also asked to explain what they learned about reading poetry. The students share this information with the rest of the class in a round-table fashion. The teacher notes important points.

The teacher finally gives a lecture summarizing the important points of the lesson and explains the use of symbolism, metaphor and personification in the poem.

The lesson concludes when students are asked to write in their notebooks. They are to begin the assignment in class and finish it at home. Their task:

(1) Discuss the observations the poem makes about life and why you agree or disagree with what the narrator in the poem has to say.

(2) Find the definitions of symbolism, metaphor, and personification in your text glossaries and describe examples of these devices in the poem.

Good thinking habits can be taught in classes like this one. Students were asked to support their opinions and conclusions with reasons and evidence. They were also expected to suspend judgment before making decisions, and to listen to the ideas of others to broaden their perspective. In this particular lesson, students were encouraged to consider the whole reading, rather than its isolated parts. Students were also asked to trust their own judgments, not to rely solely on the teacher. Finally, students were urged to change their minds if they discovered new information which made their original conclusions untenable.

From the closing written assignments and reflections, the quality of the class discussion, and the degree of individual participation, the teacher is able to tell what students got out of the lesson. As the study of poetry continues, students will read and discuss other poems, and they will eventually be asked to create original figures of speech in their own poetry.

Summary

The above lesson scenario presents a progression of steps which all dialogue activities follow with certain variations. This chapter has been an attempt to give the reader a sense of the Dialogue Teaching Model and its rationale. In the chapter which follows, the model will be outlined, illustrated, and discussed in more depth.

CHAPTER III

THE DIALOGUE TEACHING MODEL

Introduction

The Dialogue Teaching Model is an evolutionary one, for it develops in steps. Students make some decisions or judgments in writing during the response phase. They explain and defend their positions and examine other points of view during the dialogue phase. They reflect and consider what they have learned during the reflection phase. They demonstrate what they have learned during the evaluation phase. It should be noted that variations at the response and evaluation phases of the model are necessary since lesson objectives will vary. This chapter will outline and label the specific steps the Dialogue Teaching Model follows, using the short story "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant to illustrate the model's application. The model follows the eight steps: (1) synopsis, (2) response, (3) reasoning, (4) focusing, (5) recording, (6) dialogue, (7) reflection, (8) evaluation.

The Working Model

The story. "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant (1980, 140) is a good short story to teach critical thinking using the Dialogue Teaching Model. The story is about Madame Loisel, a woman given to a shallow view of life. She is overly concerned with appearances and dissatisfied with the rather mundane existence her husband

provides her. She borrows a necklace from a rich acquaintance, Madame Forestier, to wear to a gala social affair. Loisel wants to be accepted by high society and she wants to impress, but she loses the necklace and is too embarrassed to tell Madame Forestier. Instead, Madame Loisel replaces the necklace with a duplicate; to do this, she and her husband work and slave for ten years to pay for it. At the end of the story, Madame Loisel is shocked to find out that the necklace she borrowed and lost was only a cheap imitation.

Step 1. SYNOPSIS PHASE. Have students review the story in writing after the reading has been completed. Students who do not know how to write an effective synopsis could be taught beforehand, but this is not necessary. The purpose of this phase is to refresh the reader's memory as to the details of the story.

The synopsis should not be reviewed in class since this may influence the interpretations of some students before the lesson starts. During the course of this lesson, the teacher discovers how well individual students have understood the reading; consequently, to review the story beforehand may detract from this process.

Step 2. RESPONSE PHASE. Have students role-play in a written response. Design the response to make explicit the students'

interpretations of the story. The response task assigned for this story attempts to bring out each student's interpretation of Madame Loisel's character:

Write an interior monologue as if you were Madame Loisel writing in her personal diary and reacting to the news that she had worked for ten years to replace a cheap paste necklace. No one but you, Madame Loisel, will ever see what is written in your diary; you can be completely free and honest.

Students must predict Madame Loisel's reaction in writing. How would a person like Madame Loisel react to such news? If students do not understand the character, they are likely to make a prediction which will not hold up under close scrutiny during the class discussion. Students who understand the characterization of Madame Loisel and who make sound predictions should be able to support these with strong reasons and evidence.

Step 3, REASONING PHASE. Have students write an explanation of the reasoning behind their predictions. In this way students are provided enough "wait time" to think about their responses before the discussion begins. This helps students develop a "reflective style," rather than encouraging impulsive thinking (Hartman 1985, 6). Encourage students to think about the conclusions they draw. Thinking ahead of time also makes the class more lively. Students come into the discussion prepared to explain their viewpoints. Motivation is also increased by allowing students time to think because students increase their sense of commitment. Having

developed a thoughtful opinion, students naturally want to share their ideas with others.

Step 4, FOCUSING PHASE. Have students study what they have written and summarize Loisel's reaction in a single sentence or phrase. In order to compare responses in a discussion, a paragraph or so of written response must be reduced to its basic theme so that predictions can be recorded on the blackboard. This not only makes the information more manageable, but it also gives the students practice in focusing on main ideas in a meaningful, relevant way. They recognize that it is a necessary and practical step if the class is to record, compare and discuss a number of responses. Consequently, students are motivated to develop an accurate expression of their basic idea.

Step 5, RECORDING PHASE. Tell students to be receptive to all predictions, suspending criticism until they hear what is said during class discussion. Suspending judgment until examining an issue is an important critical thinking disposition (Ennis 1985, 54). A prediction which seems unlikely at first, can turn out to be reasonable.

All predictions offered are written on the board. Tell the students that they are about to enter a dialogue, not a debate. The goal of the upcoming discussion is to listen and learn from each other through an exchange of ideas. Further explain that it is the

job of class members to determine whether or not each prediction is well reasoned; therefore, it is necessary to listen and understand before making any critical comments.

Step 6, DIALOGUE PHASE. Here the class discusses the merits of each prediction until all of them have been covered. Do not express your own opinions during the course of the dialogue, since these might influence students. Sometimes differences in viewpoint between students will not be reconciled, because both sides offer sound arguments. In such cases, each side can be summarized and class members can decide for themselves. Such unresolved issues are actually beneficial, since these demonstrate to students that "right and wrong" are not always clear cut. There is room for honest disagreement. Individuals must think for themselves through fair and careful consideration.

Student predictions differ according to how well individuals understand the character and how well they have considered their responses. Following directions will also come into play. Some students will, for example, predict how they would react instead of predicting how Madame Loisel would react. These students can discover through the class discussion that they may have confused their own values with those of the character.

Sometimes students make predictions that simply do not hold up because they assign attributes to a character which are not consistent with the evidence in the story. In other words, the predicted behavior is actually out of character. The consistently honest and dependable character, for instance, does not suddenly

become a scoundrel without reason. During a successful discussion, students will be able to argue against such predictions by pointing out that the evidence in the story concerning that character makes such a prediction unreasonable.

Other errors in thinking also show up. Encourage students to spot errors in reasoning as they discuss different issues. For instance, a student may base an argument on an incident that never occurred in the story. Another student may point out that the argument does not hold up because the supporting evidence from the story is in error. The teacher acts as an observer and guide during the discussion. In a case such as the one just cited, we could ask, "Can you prove that the supporting evidence is not factual?" The student could then refer to the actual text to prove the point.

Give students a chance to change their minds if the preponderance of evidence is against their expressed view: "Charlie, in light of what Carol has just said, how would you argue your case?" Try to promote a dialogue, not a threatening debate. The goal is to make students think logically, not to entrench them in a narrow-minded struggle. In discussions such as these, students should learn to look for strong answers, rather than looking for an argument for the sake of argument.

During an actual class discussion, a number of students went back to the text of the story to find evidence to support their reasoning. In such cases it is well for the teacher to indicate that such primary source evidence is essential to resolve some differences of opinion.

Madame Forestier's character came under much closer scrutiny than expected as a result of this whole process. Although her character was not the intended focus of the lesson, the class discussion revealed many questions and observations about the nature of Forestier's character and friendship. One benefit of lessons structured in this way is that they lend themselves to a deeper understanding of the material.

During such a discussion, paraphrase what students say to support their predictions and ask the students if the paraphrasing is accurate. Occasionally, students should also paraphrase what they hear others say. This keeps the discussion productive by encouraging alert listening. Statements of support or opposition often lead to raised hands and more responses and reactions. Point out what is happening in terms of thinking behaviors during this process and give students the chance to reevaluate their positions in light of new evidence.

Responses and dialogue. Below is a list of some of the responses produced in an actual class and a summary of the dialogue that resulted. This lesson occurred in a college preparatory, ninth grade class, but the Dialogue Teaching Model may be used with success at any level, grades nine through twelve:

A. "Madame Loisel decides to change her life."

Students opposed to this prediction reasoned that Madame

Loisel was too shallow to undergo such a transformation. They said that she would be more apt to take out her anger and frustration on someone else. Others argued that her discovery was such a great shock that it could have made her see the folly of her ways. Students saying she was too shallow to change cited her past behavior as evidence. One group was arguing from evidence while the other was speculating.

B. "She is happy because she can get her property back from Madame Forestier."

Here students were quick to argue that Forestier might not return the real necklace or reimburse Madame Loisel. They had uncovered an assumption in this prediction. Students were told that Madame Loisel may have made such an assumption and that the class should accept the assumption, at least temporarily, to see if the prediction had any merit.

The class divided into two groups. The first agreed with the prediction, stating that coming into such a sum of money as the necklace was worth was enough to make anyone happy. Her years of work were rewarded with wealth.

The second group offered the argument that after spending ten years paying for a piece of junk, it would be difficult to get consolation from money. Some students offered evidence from the story which proved that Madame Loisel had grown old and decrepit from the years of worry and work. She had lost her youth and prized beauty, and had humbled herself for years. Money, they argued, could never make up for lost time and a more satisfying, happy life.

They also claimed that she could not enjoy the money now because she no longer had the beauty to impress people. These points were based on evidence from the story.

C. "Loisel blames herself for being so stupid - she should have told Forestier that she lost the necklace."

Some students questioned Forestier's honesty again. Students were digressing. At this time there was little disagreement on the point that Madame Loisel was not the type to blame herself. The students agreed that the prediction might be a typical reaction for some, but most likely not for Madame Loisel.

Students were asked if this reaction was a likely possibility, given Loisel's personality. This point was discussed. The students were told the importance of thinking in qualified terms rather than in absolutes: probably, most likely, almost certainly. Qualifying statements became the lesson at this point. Most students thought it unlikely that Madame Loisel would blame herself since she was in the habit of blaming others.

D. "Loisel blames Forestier for not telling her that the necklace was paste when she borrowed it."

Again, this brought up the question of Forestier's sincerity and honesty. Some students said that Madame Forestier should have told Madame Loisel that the necklace was not genuine. Others countered that Forestier may have assumed that Madame Loisel knew that it was not the real thing. The class was instructed to look back at the text to settle this disagreement. There was no evidence

that Madame Forestier had any dishonest motives. All other predictions were discussed until the dialogue phase concluded.

Step 7. REFLECTION PHASE. Have students describe in a journal entry any change in their thinking which occurred as a result of this dialogue. They could also explain why they now reason differently. If they have not modified their thinking, they could discuss why there has been no change. Encourage students to point out even minor changes in their thinking. Finally, students should describe any errors in reasoning that they made, and why they might have made these.

Students should share what they have learned in a brief oral statement. The teacher calls on students to tell the class something they have learned from the discussion about the story characters, the writing technique of the author, or the predictions other students made. The teacher should highlight any important observations students might make. A student might say, for instance, that he or she now understood Madame Loisel's character better. The teacher might question such statements and make comments concerning character development.

This lesson exemplifies the importance of using a dialectic, point-counter-point method. By provoking a difference of opinion, the teacher is able to run a focused class discussion which encourages participation. Students are allowed to draw their own conclusions and to explain and defend these. Through the dialogue process, students are often confronted with their own errors in judgment and encouraged to make adjustments in their reasoning.

Students who do not initially understand the finer points in a reading assignment have the opportunity to see how others reasoned it out. Since reasoning, not "rightness" or "wrongness" is emphasized, students begin to focus on what is important: sound arguments based on evidence and logical reasoning.

Students whose predictions cannot hold up are not likely to feel "stupid" if they are encouraged to change their minds given some new evidence which they had not considered. The teacher should emphasize that reasonable change is intelligent. Would anyone like to be tried by a jury which would not consider new evidence which might prove someone's innocence? Should the Congress of the United States pass laws without thoughtful discussion?

In such a class, students also get the opportunity to learn by observing many effective critical thinking models. A clever student, for instance, may go to the text of a story to support or oppose an argument. This student's behavior creates a good example for all to see. Others who oppose this student's viewpoint will often go to their texts in an attempt to offer a counter argument. The teacher can also encourage such behavior without actually giving a formal lesson, by simply asking students to prove their arguments by citing evidence from the text.

The traditional method of asking pointed questions and soliciting answers at the end of a reading assignment is an acceptable way to review a lesson. However, the model described here employs a dialogic approach which allows students to observe themselves as both reasoners and readers. When confronted by obvious errors in reasoning, interpretation or comprehension,

students are provided the opportunity to examine their thinking and to improve their strategies. The next time students are asked to predict a behavior, they are not as likely to make the same mistakes they made in previous attempts. If they do make the same mistakes, they will once again be encouraged to modify their thinking.

Step 8. EVALUATION PHASE. The teacher gives a summary lecture about what was covered during the discussion. It is important that the teacher record important points from the lecture on the blackboard so that students can take notes.

Follow this by having students write a summary statement which defines and explains major critical thinking terms: evidence, assumption, relevance, and qualifying words. Part of the lesson can be done in small groups so that students can assist each other. As students come across these concepts repeatedly during the school year, new concepts should become a part of their working vocabulary.

Also, have students write a description of how Maupassant was able to surprise the reader in the end. Students should be encouraged to mention other stories they have read which use similar techniques. In this way, students can reveal what they know while they enhance their own knowledge in the process.

Finally, the teacher can ask students to role-play the author of the story and explain the character of Madame Loisel. In this way students can reveal what they have learned about the character. As an alternative, students might be taught how to write a character description by using Madame Loisel as the topic.

Summary of Results

This lesson tries to capitalize on modern cognitive schema theory by familiarizing students with the methods an author uses to create both character and surprise in a story. Students become aware of characterization, since "evidence" developed in a story makes it possible for the reader to make inferences about the characters. Finally, students learn how an author can keep the reader "in the dark" by narrating the story from the third-person.

The Dialogue Teaching Model allows an earnest elaboration of writing techniques rather than a mechanical exercise which might consider the same elements in story writing. The follow-up study activities which are given after the dialogue further reinforce what has been discussed.

Observing how a writer creates character and a surprise ending in a story such as "The Necklace" can serve as a model for writing and for understanding future readings which use similar techniques. When a reader observes such techniques in a number of stories, this familiarity can lead to a greater appreciation of such craftsmanship.

In this lesson, dialogue is also used to enhance students' awareness of their own thinking, and to develop an awareness of the types of thinking other individuals employ through the teacher's efforts to label, clarify, and explain the reasoning which surfaces during the dialogue. Through class discussion, students usually

elaborate naturally as they cite assumptions, discuss sufficiency of evidence, question cause and effect, and comment on the relevance of information.

Teachers can promote careful listening by modeling and encouraging paraphrasing. Paraphrasing may also help students to find better ways to express themselves as well. For instance, when students find themselves dissatisfied with the teacher's or someone else's summary of their statements, they often find themselves revising what they have said to clarify their position. In this way, students clarify their ideas in both their own minds and in the minds of their audience.

Response Phase Variations

This chapter has thus far attempted to describe the basic eight-step Dialogue Teaching Model and some of its advantages. At this point it should be noted that not every eight-step lesson works in exactly the same manner. The response and evaluation phases will differ depending on the lesson's objectives. Each response phase assigns students a task which should motivate the discussion of an open-ended question based on some important aspect of a story or poem. Below are three types of responses which may be used:

Sequel-prediction response. The lesson on "The Necklace" used sequel-prediction at the response phase of the model. Students predicted a character's behavior in a story sequel. The attempt here was to get students involved in a discussion of Madame Loisel's

character. As a literature lesson this was the main intention, a lesson on characterization. It should be clear from the description of the "The Necklace" lesson, that the sequel-prediction response can evolve into an in-depth discussion of characterization.

Frame-of-reference response. Students can also be asked to role-play by writing about a story from a specific point of view, different from that of the actual narrator, or the students might actually role-play the narrator. I call this response a frame-of-reference variation since it requires students to look at a situation in a story or poem from a different vantage point. The resulting dialogue would be used to compare responses. The point of these comparisons would be to see which of these make sense in terms of how well students understand people different from themselves. Students might be asked, for instance, to write a teenager's story, from the point of view of a parent so that students could get a better insight into adult concerns.

The dialogue which results from comparing such responses should motivate students to consider how different parents think and why they think the way they do. Such a lesson can help students to more thoroughly understand their own relationships with parents and other adults. This approach can be used to discuss many different types of stories and poems which concern themselves with differences between people: young and old, male and female, accuser and accused.

A frame-of-reference response is particularly appropriate for teaching theme or conflict in literature. In the lesson scenario on Master's poem "George Gray" in Chapter II, the

frame-of-reference response was used to make the author's use of figurative language explicit while uncovering the theme of the poem. In a story like Twain's Huckleberry Finn, such a response could be used to bring out the differences in perspective between slave and slave holder, a subject which is developed in the novel with considerable power. In such a discussion, students can also deepen their knowledge of history.

Conflict-alternative response. Students can also be asked to role-play a character who has made some kind of a significant decision, moral or otherwise. In this response the student must agree or disagree with a character's decision. The student must also come up with alternatives as well. Themes concerning morality or plain good sense can be discussed using this method. This response is inspired by descriptions of "rational" and "conflict" strategies by Hall and Davis (1975, 133-145).

John Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men (1937) is a story which readily lends itself to the use of a conflict-alternative response. Students can be asked to agree or disagree with the decision of George Milton, the main character. George took the life of his best friend, a mentally handicapped man named Lenny Small, who seems doomed to a certain and horrible death at the hands of a lynch mob.

The conflict-alternative response is appropriate to discussions of any story in which a character makes an important decision. Discussions which follow from this response can have several benefits. Students learn to consider alternatives when

making decisions. They uncover the motivations of characters, and in some cases the author's view of life may come into question.

Teachers using the Dialogue Teaching Model need not limit themselves to these three response methods. Teachers are encouraged to develop new ones. Not all literary works lend themselves to the response methods described here. These should be taught in some other way, or a new response task can be developed to tackle the problem. Any response method should have two basic purposes: to motivate the discussion of an open-ended question and to consider some aspect of the assigned reading.

Evaluation Variation

The evaluation phase by necessity varies from lesson to lesson, depending on what the lesson accomplishes. Evaluation should occur during the lesson as well as at its conclusion. It is suggested that evaluation be tied to instruction.

Evaluation actually begins during the lesson. Observing students during class dialogues is a significant way of evaluating them on an ongoing basis. Here, students demonstrate their knowledge of both literature and critical thinking. During the dialogue phase of the lesson, teachers can also observe the thinking, listening, and speaking skills of their students. Actively observing students provides meaningful opportunities to expand their knowledge and skills (see Chapter II). Later in the lesson, during the reflection phase, students get the chance to openly share what they have gained during each dialogue. This is a

valuable evaluation and teaching opportunity as well, since the teacher can observe and instruct as opportunities present themselves.

After the reflection phase of the lesson is over, the teacher should prepare a lecture which summarizes what has occurred in terms of both literature study and critical thinking. The teacher must then decide what should be emphasized and how this could be accomplished in the evaluation. There is no simple formula to follow in these matters. However, it is suggested that the best way to evaluate students at this point is through written and spoken presentations.

Evaluation tasks which employ writing and speaking assignments are preferable to "objective" testing since these give students a better opportunity to demonstrate how much they actually know. Such evaluation assignments are also needed to teach both writing and speaking skills. These assignments might be as simple as writing definitions, examples, observations, descriptions, or summaries. Other assignments might have students employ concepts such as metaphor and personification in their own writing. Using approaches like these allows students to demonstrate their knowledge while they develop their skills and reinforce their learning.

Larger projects might also be employed. When teaching Steinbeck's Of Mice and Men, for instance, students might write a final argument in a trial of George Milton. The best of these could be selected and the class could be divided into small groups to work with the "winning" writers to practice spoken deliveries. Finally, by class vote, the most convincing speeches could be determined.

Such selections could be based on criteria aimed at having students evaluate their peers in terms of content, style and delivery. In this instance, teachers can evaluate the lesson itself from the content of the final arguments students write. The evaluation also becomes a lesson in speech writing and delivery.

In the Dialogue Teaching Model, evaluation is an ongoing part of the teaching process. Teachers should be active observers during the dialogue and reflection phases of the lesson. They can take advantage of learning opportunities as they arise in class. At the end of the reflection phase, the teacher should develop assignments which both evaluate and instruct. Evaluation should not be limited to a testing procedure. It should be viewed as an opportunity for students to demonstrate their knowledge and develop their skills.

Conclusion

The concepts and principles underlying this model have now been discussed, and the model itself has been explained and illustrated in some detail. Like any teaching method, however, the effective use of this model takes some practice. The next chapter will discuss how to begin using the Dialogue Teaching Model.

CHAPTER IV

GETTING STARTED

Introduction

This final discussion of the Dialogue Teaching Model explains how teachers might begin using the model in their classes. For the sake of clarity, this chapter speaks directly to the reader. All the phases of the model are mentioned. Potential problems are pointed out so that these may be avoided. The suggestions contained in this section should help teachers get the best possible results.

Following the Eight Steps

Begin using the Dialogue Teaching Model by setting up an outline based on its eight steps: (1) reading, (2) written response, (3) reasoning, (4) focusing, (5) recording, (6) dialogue, (7) reflection, (8) evaluation. Refer to the examples in Chapters II and III for details.

Selecting the reading. The first step, the reading phase, takes some thought. The model does not lend itself to every piece of literature. It is especially suited to stories and dramas which deal with moral decisions, personal and social conflicts, strong characterization, or writing techniques which may confuse the student reader. Dialogue lessons on poetry which depend heavily on figurative language or which express the writer's philosophy, an

unusual viewpoint, or an ambiguity of some kind also work very well (See "George Gray" lesson, Chapter II). Perhaps developing a feel for the model by first using a reading from the examples in this paper would be a good way to begin. (See "George Gray" lesson, Chapter II or "The Necklace" lesson, Chapter III).

The effective response. The second step, developing a response assignment, makes clear whether or not the reading is suitable to be taught using this model. Some readings are simply not suitable. If one of the three response techniques developed in this paper does not seem appropriate for a reading, try to develop a new type of response. The important thing is to get students to interpret their reading in a way which can lead to a discussion of some important aspect of that reading.

The prediction-sequel response is appropriate for discussing stories which center on strong characterization, since predicting a character's future behavior or reactions depends on the reader's understanding of that character.

Altering the frame-of-reference can be used to develop a deeper understanding of both characters, conflicts, and social issues. When students write from a different frame-of-reference, it allows them to view a conflict or character from a different perspective.

Have students take a stand. Use the conflict-alternative response to encourage students to grapple with an issue or decision which is central to a reading. This technique is suitable to readings which deal with social and moral issues.

Have students role-play in their written responses whenever possible, since this allows them to broaden their perspective. Predicting a character's behavior by having students pretend they are that character, for instance, allows students to more closely identify with the character.

Be imaginative! Write a response assignment which will interest and challenge students. Have them write their response at the beginning of the class period rather than at home to make sure that all students participate in this crucial step. Be patient and give students time to think and write.

If your students get actively involved at this point in the lesson, the rest of the lesson should go well. When students invest themselves in the response assignment, they usually become enthusiastic about sharing their ideas with the rest of the class during the recording and dialogue phases of the lesson.

Reasoning. After the students have finished writing their responses, have them explain their reasoning. Explain to students that it is important that they be able to explain why they wrote their response as they did. If students are going to later explain and defend their responses, they should first give some thought to their reasoning.

Focusing. Tell students to read their responses carefully and reduce them to one main idea, a sentence or phrase which can be recorded on the blackboard.

Handling responses. Go around the room asking students for their focused responses and record these on the board. If there are too many students to do this, ask for volunteers or ask a wide sampling of students for their responses. Record these on the board.

If a response is not clearly expressed, work with the student and the class to improve the wording, but model a respect for students by being careful not to alter their ideas. The emphasis at this point should be placed on trying to understand each response. Model good listening skills by trying to record each student's response accurately.

Students themselves will often begin to criticize the responses of their classmates before any discussion has even begun. Be sure to emphasize that students should suspend their final judgments until they hear the reasoning behind each response. Be sure to model this kind of behavior as well.

Keys to productive dialogue. Begin discussing each response by asking the students to explain the reasoning behind the response. Some responses will evoke immediate criticism. In these cases try

to get a dialogue going between the students involved in a difference of opinion. As others raise their hands to contribute to the dialogue, involve them in the discussion.

If a point of argument needs clarification, paraphrase what has been said and ask the student who made the point if you have stated their case correctly. If you feel a student is not giving a fair hearing to what another has to say, ask that student to paraphrase what has been said, and remind the student that he or she does not seem to be listening thoughtfully enough. Move back and forth between students: "Johnny, can you answer Mary's question?" "Frank, do you agree with Mary or Johnny?"

If two students start to talk between themselves, allow them to continue as long as the other students in the class are attentive, the conversation is civil, and light is being shed on the subject. However, be careful not to let a few students dominate the discussion, since this may turn other students away. Observe what is happening in the class as a whole, and do whatever you can to keep the discussion lively and fruitful for everyone.

Make your observations known to the class, but do not influence what students believe by stating or suggesting your opinion. If someone accuses someone else of over-generalizing, for instance, point this out without taking sides: "Mary, Johnny is saying that you are over-generalizing when you said no one can be trusted, what do you say to that? Are you sure that "no one" can be trusted? Through discussion experiences like this, along with follow-up assignments, students should learn to use the language of critical thinking on their own.

Keep a copy of Ennis's thirteen critical thinking dispositions (see page 3) handy. Also, review frequently the modified and more comprehensive list of critical thinking skills found in the Appendix. Review these as often as necessary. Having posters displaying these dispositions and skills in your classroom is very helpful for everyone.

Develop your own observation and labeling skills through practice. If you miss opportunities to spot or label thinking behaviors, don't be overly concerned. Students will most likely develop thinking skills anyway, as they weigh the merits of various arguments voiced during class dialogues. Modeling Ennis's thirteen critical thinking dispositions alone should go a long way to help students to become more skillful.

For variety, try small group discussion from time to time. Let these groups write group responses and let the dialogue take place between the small groups rather than between individuals. Be creative! Experiment!

If students want to know your opinion or if you feel that you can shed more light on a subject, save your comments until the end. Sending students home trying to make up their own minds keeps interest at a peak. It is also a way of getting them to rely on themselves.

Respect students' interpretations. Do not fall into the trap of believing that the teacher is the only person in the room who has the definitive interpretation. Allowing a free dialogue which is not controlled by a personal agenda can be liberating and informative. It also allows variety, since classes conducted on the

same reading often differ. If you have an important viewpoint to express, save it until the end of the discussion.

Journal-notebook. After all of the recorded responses have been discussed, have students reflect on what they have learned. Students should write in a journal-notebook about their initial response, their present thoughts, and why they did or did not change their viewpoint in light of the class discussion. Include questions about what they may have learned about critical thinking or literature. Also allow students to share these thoughts with their peers. Finally, prepare a lecture which summarizes your observations and the important points of the lesson. Assign tasks such as recording and explaining new concepts at this time.

Evaluation and skills. The evaluation phase can be an opportunity to do more than evaluate a student's knowledge of literature or critical thinking through a teacher-made objective test. This phase of the lesson can be used to teach writing, speech and other skills. Character descriptions, persuasive writing assignments, thematic posters concerning literature or critical thinking, or original poems are just a few possibilities. In other words, develop evaluation assignments which provide a vehicle for improving skills.

A Final Word

It should be remembered that the Dialogue Teaching Model's primary purpose is to get students actively involved in learning about literature and reading through discussions which develop their critical thinking skills. By the very nature of the activities employed, the model attempts to develop students who are better listeners, speakers and thinkers. It is important to note, however, that a teacher must still employ other methods of instruction. Important information and concepts must still be imparted through lecture, reading, and research assignments. Lessons should still be designed to develop writing and speaking skills. A balance must be maintained in the use of classroom time.

As with anything new, teachers who experiment with this model of teaching, should expect to have some problems in the beginning. With experience, adjustments can be made to reduce these to a minimum. Teachers sometimes have to take risks to improve techniques.

Finally, teachers should experiment with any new or different teaching method based on their own studies, experience, and beliefs. In employing any model of teaching, teachers should be thoughtful and flexible enough to alter it in any way which improves performance.

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APPENDIX

Critical Thinking Skills

The list of critical thinking abilities listed below is a revised version of those developed by Robert Ennis (1985, 46). The list has been modified to make it helpful to the English teacher using the Dialogue Teaching Model. Notice that the skills listed often overlap. The accompanying statements and questions are included to give some sense of how these skills come into play during a discussion. Finally, please note that this appendix is meant to be a helpful general outline and nothing more.

1. Identifying and developing questions.
What motivated the character?
What should we ask at this point?
2. Identifying and developing criteria.
What do we mean by "insane?"
We better set up some criteria for "insanity."
3. Keeping the situation in mind.
Don't forget, the story is set during World War II.
4. Identifying conclusions.
Mary has concluded that the motive was greed.
5. Identifying stated reasons.
You believe he lied to save face?
6. Identifying unstated reasons.
Are you saying that he did it for money?

7. Identifying similarities and differences.
I'd like you to make a list comparing and contrasting these two characters.

8. Identifying and dealing with irrelevance.
Does it really matter that the author never experienced what he wrote?

9. Identifying the structure of an argument.
Let's describe the argument of the defense in this trial.

10. Summarizing.
Let's try to summarize your argument.

11. Clarifying and/or challenging.
Why? What's your point?
Can you give me an example?
Is that a good example?
What does that have to do with it?
Does it make any difference?
What exactly are the facts?
Is this what you mean?
Would you explain that further?

12. Source credibility.
Does he have any expertise?
Is there a conflict of interest here?
Do most experts agree with that theory?
Does his reputation make him a trustworthy source?
Did they follow the correct procedures to reach that conclusion?
Does he have anything to lose by stating his beliefs openly?
Were the reasons she gave sufficient to convince you?
Was the investigation careful or shoddy?

13. Observing.
Just because he was staggering doesn't mean he was drunk, does it?
Have her observations been influenced by the passage of time?
Is this what she actually saw - or just hearsay?
Is this an accurate record of the events of that day?
Are the observations made corroborated by anyone else?
Do they have enough access to the boss to know?

14. Deduction/inference - induction/generalizing.

Are you contradicting yourself?
Were the conditions bad enough to result in murder?
Is that the only reason?
Some or all?
Is that likely?
That might happen if and only if...
Is that a good sampling of opinion?
Is that the only cause?
Are there other causes not as apparent?
What were the most important causes?
Do you believe the claim that many middle-class
whites feel this way?
Is that what the author meant?
Is the accepted history accurate on this point?
Is there another possible explanation for her
behavior?

15. Value judgments.

Was he forced to do it?
What are the consequences of this decision?
Did they have alternatives to stealing?
Is lying always wrong?
Let's look at this from as many different angles
as we can before we make a decision.

16. Advanced clarifying.

Can you come up with another way of saying that?
What can you compare it to?
How would you categorize this story?
How much is enough?
Define that for me.
What's your position on this?
Are we basing our argument on a good definition?
Does everyone agree with Jim's interpretation?
You seem to be basing your argument on an
assumption of guilt?
For the sake of argument, let's assume that the
character did act out of greed.

17. Strategy.

Before we discuss the character's sanity, let's define what we mean by "sane" and "insane."
We need to know the legal criteria for manslaughter.
Before deciding, let's look at our alternatives.
Let's try it and see what happens.
Let's give the poem another reading from start to finish.
Let's watch our progress to see if we can make further improvements.
Let's work together and listen to everyone's suggestions.
What can we do to put together a convincing argument?
Keep your audience in mind - are they likely to believe you?

18. Recognizing fallacies.

"The character did it because he did it?" Does that make sense?
Is the claim true simply because it was made by an expert?
Does the fact that everyone else is voting for the new law make it right?
Does everyone believe that we have answered the question?
"Either you do what I want you to, or you are not my friend." Is this a fair statement?
His answer seemed deliberately vague.
You can't have it both ways.
Just because it has always been done that way doesn't necessarily mean that there aren't other ways of doing it.
Is that analogy a good one?
This is a hypothetical case, it might not really work out this way.
Is this an oversimplification of the problem?
Does the fact that he was nearby mean that he did it?