

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN ANALYZING LITERARY WORKS THROUGH MAXIMIZING PROJECT WORK AND QUESTIONING

Kurnia Ningsih
English Department, FBS. UNP
Krn_ningsih@yahoo.com

Abstract

Heading to the global community students should have ability to engage and interact in English, to understand as well as be able to appreciate the different cultures, even develop their perspective towards the life. Luckily, literary works can fulfil all these requirements since the students should analyze the text they read. They can't simply do reading comprehension. They have to make inferences, questions, interpretation and evaluation in order to reveal the meaning not explicitly stated by the authors. They have to make sense of the text. In other words they have to read not what the text says but what the text wants to say. This paper argues for the use of project work and questioning strategies to engage students in analyzing literary works. These strategies are not new, they have been familiar to our ears. However the applying of the two strategies at the same time could expose the students creativity in using language, reading, thinking, analyzing, even arguing. Moreover they are getting use to work collaboratively, decrease their anxiety, express their ideas and appreciate other opinions. Questioning is a kind of facilitation the lecturers apply during the class discussion that enable them to use metacognitive activities, confirm or disaffirm their analysis or even change their minds. All of these are going to be discussed in this paper.

Key Words: Literary work. Project Work and Questioning

1. INTRODUCTION

Every university expects their alumniees to get a job and be ready to face the global community. Therefore they try hard to provide students with knowledge and skills needed in each of their fields. Students in an English literature program has a big chance to involve in this area since they are supposed to be provided with the ability to engage and interact in English, to understand as well as to be able to appreciate the different cultures, even to develop their perspective towards the life. As Ismael, in his article,(2010) says that students can gain insight into literature by gaining entrance to a world familiar or unfamiliar to them due to the cultural aspects of works, and taking a voyage from literary text to their own mind to finds meanings for ideas, leading to critical thinking. The students entering study program of English literature are expected to be good in critical thinking and analyzing text dealing with the human life. Unfortunately they are not able to meet these expectation. It should be understood that many students come to university without ability to think critically, select the author major points, and restructure ideas especially from literary works. These problems relate to the inability to read critically. That's why they should be trained to build this competence which are going to be very useful in facing the field of works so that they can fulfil the requirements and be acceptable in the global maket.

The students in this program should be engaged in the high level of thinking, responding and arguing to what they already read. In this case, project work and questioning are believable to handle the competences they need. According to Pokorna and Kujeva (2010. p.1) project work allows students to use their imagination, develop their capabilities in learning and brings in relation to motivation, relevance and educational values. While questioning according to Center for Teaching Excellent (2006) provides opportunities for students to become actively engage in the learning process while also developing valuable metacognitive skills that will benefit them the resst of their lives. Well-implemented the benefit of project work and questioning can improve the students ability and build their academic competence needed for

their future. This paper argues how to maximize the benefit of the project work and design the effective questions that encourage students in analyzing the literary works in and outside of the class.

2. LITERARY WORK

Literary works are not simply the creation of the authors, they bring multiple meaning and value. Ibsen (in Ningsih 2005, p.65) states that literary texts represent a valuable source of civilization knowledge and the very nature of literature with its ambiguity can easily provide a stimulus for expressing different opinions. The texts seem to give detail more than what people think and expect. According to Guerin et.all (in Ningsih 2008. p.4) Literary work is a creation by someone at some time in history, and it is intended to speak to other human being about some idea or issue that has human relevance. Author writes to communicate their insights to the readers, in the hope that the readers will recognized aspects of their thoughts and experiences in their work. Besides, the language used may touch the sense and emotion that enable the readers to visualize and experience the events. Gillespie (in Ningsih 2008 p.4) says that reading literary text means to travel to the world beyond the readers own, engage in a conversation among cultures, explore unfamiliar traditions and evaluate human relationship in an attempt to better understand the meaning of community our pluralistic society. Furthermore he claims that literature as a vehicle that will help us to discover more about ourselves and the meaning we can make of life. Unfortunately not all the literary works can trigger the arguments and lead to sharply discussion. Therefore it is important to select the right kinds of literary texts suitable for engaging students in analyzing, arguing and discussing their own ideas.

There are many arguments about what kind of text can be analyzed by students. Some universities keep students using the canon or classic ones. I myself prepare to use the contemporary or populer literature, but they are awards- winner. For the novel, students are encouraged to read the the awards- winning ones while for short stories, poetry or drama it can be either the writers or the works are winner. The reason is those texts are full of conflicts or problem close to the fenomena occurs in this era. There are many authors, men or women, got literature awards such as Khaled Hosseini, V.S Naipaul, Mukherji, Arundhaty Roy, Tonni Morrison, Louise Erdrich, Nadine Gordimer. David Malouf, Kazuo Ishiguro. Jamaica Kincaid, Sandra Cisneros, Suheir Hammad, Dima Hilal and many others. All of their works really touch the humanity. The topics are variety from power, slavery, gender inequality, crisis identity, genocide, life of immigrant, event to human as victims of technology. The works of Khaled Hosseini are emosionally complex that involve our deep emotion- hate, sad, angry, disappointed and all mix together that make us think deeply the brutality of life. Poverty and gender roles leave scars. *And the Mountains Echoed* ,one of his works, is an unforgettable novel about finding a lost piece of yourself in someone else. It is a story about how the choices people make resonate through generations. It explores ways in which families nurture, wound, betray, honor and sacrifice for one another. The most touchy point is all the actions or problems are close to our lives in reality.

3. PROJECT WORK

Project work is not new in education especially in teaching –learning language. Many researches has done by the experts such as Allen 2004, Gu 2004, Ho 2003lee 2002 (in Allan and Stoller 2005) to reveal the successful of the project:

- focuses real-world subject matter that can sustain the interest of students
- requires students collaboration and at the same time, some degree of the students autonmy and independence
- can accommodate a purposeful and explicit focus on form and other aspects of language
- is process and product oriented, wtih an emphasis on integrated skills and end of project reflection.

The result is often authenticity of experience, improve language and content knowledge, increased metacognitive awareness, enhanced critical thinking and decision-making abilities, intensity of motivation and engagement, improve social skills and a familiarity with target language resource.

The project in this study is the combination of teacher guidance, feedback, students arguments and elaborated task with some degree of challenge adapted from Alan and Stoller's suggestions in their article (2008 .p 11). This project of course depends on the contextual factors. Since it is to engage literary students in analyzing, thus the project is going to apply its benefit. The activities should be handled in a good way so that it works well. This is done for the class Prose 2 - reading novels- after the students passed Prose 1- short story. This is 16 weeks –class for students of Literature program in which two novels were assigned and the students, individually, decided on two more novels to be read. The novel they choosed should be awards-winner and approved by the lecturer in order to avoid the plagiarism. It can be done for Short stories, Poetry and Drama class. The first week of the semester is for the explanation about the procedure of project work they are going to do, the novels they are going to read. They work in a group collaboratively outside and inside the class. The first novel should be finished within 7 weeks, where each week and each group has to present their analysis. This presentation is going to be discussed in the class leaded by the lecturer where all students participate collaboratively. They have mid Test and at the same time they submit their individually analisis of the novel they choosed. Then they continue with the second novel in the same procedure for the rest of the semester. At the end of semester they have to submit the analisis of the second novel.

The two novels assigned by lecturer should be presented and discussed in the class. Uniquely their presentation and discussion implicitly show whether the group works cooperatively or collaboratively. Teasley in Kozar (2010) describes cooperative work as a task that is accomplished by dividing it among participants, where each person is responsible for a porision of the problem solving, while the collaborative works as “ the mutual engagement of participants in a coordinated effort to solve the problem together. Collaboration is not always easy to achieve especially at the beginning. The project can be exciting or full of difficulties and challenges. Taylor (2013) suggests to start the project with a specific question that the students is seeking to answer. He also adds to state the objective of project clearly. Therefore there are some steps (adapted from.Allan and Stoller) should be followed in doing project work.

- The lecturer mentions the objective of the project and explain how to do the project work. The lecturer also has to explain what it means by working collaboratively. The students should choose the members of the group (3 person only), and stick to the same group till the end of semester. They consider their role in the group and in the class. They have to work collaboratively in group and have the responsibility to make the group better.
- The lecturer reminds them that their mark is given individually even they work in the group. This makes them serious and try to get the chance to participate in learning.
- Each member of the group has to find the information as much as possible in literary text they read. Since they are limited into 3 members, everyone can contribute and it is easier to compile the ideas, then analyze them so that they can find the meaning and topics they are going to present in the class.
- Each group should present their work in the classroom every week. It starts from 1 till 3 or 4 chapters decided by the lecturer depends on the students progress. After a few weeks they usually can read faster and more chapters to be discussed.
- The lecturer leads the discussion by giving questions that make them realize to re think, reread even change their ideas
- The presentation should be proved by the data they quote from literary text to support their analisis. This leads into arguments. Here the lecturer has to pay attention so that

the mistake can be handled directly. It means the lecturer must read the text. These are going to trigger the discussion in the classroom.

- During the discussion in the class they should participate in giving opinion based on the group or by themselves. They are eager to express their own ideas since they are used to in the group.
- Design and sequence task with great care, make sure that everyone gives contribution in group working, and class discussion.

Those steps help them understand and evaluate the merits of different possibilities. They also realize that they have to confirm or disaffirm the ideas. Besides they can appreciate each others.

4. QUESTIONING

Reading literary text is different from others. We have to do close reading for it. According to Iser (in Lodge 2000) the readers use the dynamic process of recreation during the reading. They looked forward, they look back, they decide then they may change their decision, they form their expectation, they are shocked by texts nonfulfillment, they question, they muse, they accept the idea, even reject them. Uncounsciously they active their metacognitive. This happened since the readers interact with the text. While reading, the readers according to Iser fulfill the gap between the lines, therefore they can reveal the meaning behind the text. In order to help the students interact with the text, questioning has important role. Moreover Iser says that with the literary text we may say that the reading process is selective, and the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its individually realization. Thus the second reading of literary works often produces a different impression from the first. It is more different if the readers read with shaper questions. In literature rereading is not a strategy for answering right there questions, but to activate their critical thinking.

Questioning is not only for the classroom but also for the work outside the class. Using questions in the classroom is expected to engage students with the material they read, and promote a critical analysis. Fries-Gaither (2008) in her article writes that some researchers classified questions into lower and higher cognitive questions. *Lower questions* (facts, closed, direct, recall and knowledge questions) involve the recall of information. *Higher cognitive questions* (open-ended, interpretive, evaluative, inquiry, inferential, and synthesis questions) involves the mental manipulation of information to produce or support an answer. The higher cognitive questions is suitable for literature students since they need to analyze the text. The aim of questions here is to develop critical thinking skills, and nurture insights. This is done by the lecturer during the presentation and discussion of the group in the class. Some tips to do the questions (adapted from Fries-Gaither and Center for Teaching Excellent’s ideas) are:

- Ask provocative questions to energize students into saying something, to rethink, to evaluate what they have done, and to promote critical analysis.
- Ask students to bring one or two questions based on the text they read. This is important so that the lecturer is not the one who asks the questions only but also should answer the student questions.
- Engage other students by having them answer the questions of their friends
- Make questions that lead students to form their own questions needed in their analysis

Some questions that I use to apply during the discussion in the class. For instance:

This is based on the text the students analysis:

“ *A finger had to be cut, to save the hand*” (Husseini, p.5)

The questions:

1. What does it mean? Is it a literal or inferential meaning?
2. Do you think the finger can save hand? Can a finger be replaced ?
3. In what way does it help?
4. What do you think the effect of it?.

“Father had said. *No crying, I won’t have it.* And there hadn’t been any. No one in the village asked after Pari. No one even spoke her name. It astonished

Abdullah how thoroughly she had vanished from their lives.

The culture in this context is really close to the reality where a woman are not considered as a valuable creature. The patriarchy system has a strong role in this society. This should be revealed by students that they sometime ignore so they lost the point. Lead the students to reveal the meaning by asking provocative questions such as:

1. Why does the father not allow Abdullah to cry?
2. What make Abdullah wonder with the attitude of the society towards Pari?
3. “No one even spoke her name” what does it mean to you? Why do you think it happened? How do you relate to reality?

The questions given to students is not only to lead them finding the answer but it also lead them to creat their own questions needed when they read. These are going to make them focus on central point so that their analisis coherent and has clear direction.

4. CONCLUSION

Well-implemented the benefit of project work and questioning can improve the students ability and build their academic competence needed for their future. Working collaboratively has made them realize that they have ability to express themselves, give contribution to team work even trigger in finding the best solution. They have been implicitly exposed to the creativity in using language, reading, thinking, analyzing, even arguing. Moreover they activate their metacognitive, decrease their anxiety, and appreciate others opinion. What I most enjoy is seeing students develop their skills in thinking and brave to express their own ideas. Everyone in the class is ready to talk, ask the questions and argue to each other positively.

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