

## When Questions Become Answers

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Questions question our understanding of concepts, situations and ideas. There is no question about this. This is an account of the way one teacher, Kinzom Khampa, used the tool of enquiry to get children find the answers.

Kinzom, an English teacher, has been teaching for five years and is presently at GIC Pujar Gaon, Uttarkashi. She did not have to read heavy academic research papers to reach this conclusion. Armed with the passion to make her children proficient not only in English language but also in all subjects in and out of school, Kinzom quickly realised the power of questions.

The children in Kinzom's class were used to rote memorisation and Kinzom's initial euphoria in the first few weeks of the academic session about how well the children were responding to the lessons, turned into despair when she realised that they did not understand the meanings, usages and application of simple words in a given lesson. She also realised that the text book was a mere tool, and that too not a perfect one, for getting the process of learning going. She then started experimenting in her classroom. She closed the text book and asked the bewildered children to do the same.

Each lesson in the text book is just a pointer to a theme, thought and or idea. Once the core idea gets disseminated amongst and internalised by the children, everything falls into place. And this was where Kinzom started from.

She started discussing things in class. All sorts of subjects, ideas and thoughts started floating around the class room. Of course, it took her sometime to prod the thinking processes in the children but once she got through to actually getting them to wear and use the thinking cap, conversations flowed and ideas blossomed. The children were not really used to talking with the teacher. Before this, they were used to being talked at, but never really been heard. Now, Kinzom began her academic year with the curriculum of talk.

Once the children got comfortable with voicing their thoughts, Kinzom started the game of questions. She introduced a topic, a discussion got generated, thoughts solidified and then those thoughts were questioned. She was also aware that thoughts need to be questioned very gently otherwise it would be easy for the children to retreat into their shells, something she could not afford to allow to happen if she wanted them to think critically. So, a whole week, sometimes a whole month, was dedicated to careful selection of questions related to a particular discussion which would ultimately lead to the core idea behind the lessons in the textbook. However, before the children got to the lessons, they were armed with a logical understanding which had withstood the barrage of cleverly thought-out questions.

The children are encouraged to question the teacher and each other. Kinzom firmly believes in the creation of a positive space where the voice of each child is heard and respected.



Slowly, Kinzom understood that she had chanced upon a powerful weapon in her repertoire of questions. She also saw that close-ended questions with a simple yes or no for answer, the norm in the textbook, were not conducive to understanding. They were only encouraging learning by rote and she was not going to let that happen. She painstakingly created a list of her own of questions for each lesson, questions which tested the understanding of the child which encouraged the child to think beyond the lesson, which linked the lesson to her context. For the first time, question marks became friends!

Moreover, she made the questions easy at first then they got to different levels of difficulty. This also put a demand on the cognitive ability of the students. Unknown to her, Kinzom was actually working according to Bloom's Taxonomy in that she was trying to equip children with tools of knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

In all this, Kinzom is clear that once her children understand the lessons, they will also be able to read (with meaning), write (originally) and speak (without hesitation) in English.

She believes that questions have been able to foster critical thinking skills, better communication skills, enhance creativity in her children besides making them good listeners and it is rather evident in her class room where the children converse with confidence and are not fearful of asking questions.

Kinzom might not be able to finish her syllabus on time all the time, but she knows that her children will know how to question things rationally and that in itself is the biggest reward for her.

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