Could Questions Be Answers?
The Personal Growth Method in the Teaching of English Literature to EFL Learners

Iman Hammad*
An-Najah National University

Abstract: *Since educators have puzzled over the best models suggested on the teaching of English literature to EFL learners, re-examining strategies of literature instruction becomes a necessity in this rapidly changing world. This requires developing a multi-faceted model, which neither focuses on language skills only nor does it use texts as capsules for a culture that students perceive as inferior or at best irrelevant,. This paper explores the personal growth model in an attempt to bridge the gap between the cultural model that treats the text as a source of information about the target culture and the language model that focuses on the way language is used. The personal growth model is a process-based approach and tries to be more learner-centered. This paper suggests that this model not only encourages learners to develop positive attitudes towards the text they read, but it also leads them to project their own feelings into it. Based upon the researcher's teaching experience, this model encourages the students to make the text their own and it helps in making the language more memorable. Finally, the paper presents some recommendations for EFL learners regarding the use of the personal growth approach in our classes.*

1. Introduction

Educators have puzzled over the best methodology for teaching literature; they continuously look for strategies to make the best connections between students and the text. These attempts, however, have been confronted with many difficulties pertaining to teaching methodology, curriculum and students themselves.

Despite the many models available, instructors are still unsure about the best strategies for exercising students' critical thinking skills in tackling literary texts. This is partially caused by the common practice of instructors to select literary texts on the basis of artistic value without any regard to the relatedness of the work to the students' experiences or backgrounds. Another major obstacle facing the teaching of literature is the dichotomy which exists between the English that students learned in their schools and that which is used for instruction at the university level.

Furthermore, students are not proficient enough to comprehend literary texts without additional linguistic support which will equip them with the tools necessary to grasp the human essence in a literary work which belongs to another culture. Students actually view the culture presented in literary texts written in a foreign language as a deformation of a culture which is substantially irrelevant to them but are forced to know for the sake of examinations.

This paper will investigate the effectiveness of using a new model which blends the existent models in such a way which encourages students to give their

own interpretation of literary text depending on lesson plans based on questions and answers drawing heavily on students' own experiences and personal feelings. Once the students get the necessary connections to the text, the next step will be elaborating on the culture presented in the text and how it has a certain degree of resemblance to the students' own culture in its being an experience of a fellow human being. After becoming aware of this reasoning process, the instructor will give some linguistic support, which has for its subjects the expressions, the structures and the vocabulary items which the students found most touching and most relevant. The instructor will actually induce this response by highlighting the skill of the writer in giving elevated expression to a common human experience.

2. Review of Related Literature

Many methods have been suggested by researchers in the domain of teaching literature in a non-native context. The methods suggested all emerge from the objective that the teaching of literature is to attain and why literature is to be taught in the first place. "Literature encourages interaction. Literary texts are often rich in multiple layers of meaning, and can be effectively mined for discussions and sharing feelings or opinions." Literature motivates readers and encourages them to develop a sense of achievement once they understand a piece of important value (Clandfield 2003:2).

One of the important challenges has been how to engage students in a reflective profound experience with the literary work without spoiling the pleasure of reading by doing plenty of "'peripheral" activities (Reinhardt 2000: 1). Another challenge is related to literature. Language and culture are inseparable. Therefore, there is no point in asking "how much of the culture of a country should be taught along with a language" (Tang 1999: 1). The culture in which a person lives influences and shapes his/her attitudes, feelings and responses to experiences. Culture colors our interpretation of the world (Matikainen and Duffy 2000: 1).

One of the major functions of literature is to serve as a medium to transmit the culture of the people who speak the language in which it is written (Plastina 2000: 1). Even the role of language in the earlier part of this century was to obtain access to the masterpieces of a certain civilization (Allen 1985: 138).

However, the most important conflict has been between the two major camps which exist within the university environment: between those who emphasize the students' communicative competence as an end in itself and those who insist on the importance of exposure to culture through literature (Shanahan 1997: 164 - 74). The students, on the other hand, have their own objectives to achieve. One of the problems facing the instructors of English literature is that the students who study English have no literary interests but they take English literature because they want to get good jobs. Others maintain that literature has to be studied for its great value in "encapsulating the accumulated wisdom, the best that has been thought and felt within a culture" (Carter and Long 1991: 2). Literary works are the 'relics' of culture which help students in understanding

and appreciating foreign ideologies and cultures. Literature is the medium, which is capable of preserving cultural and artistic heritage (Zafeiriadou 2004: 2).

For others, the aims of teaching English literature are to introduce the student gradually to literature in such a way that arouses their faculties for reading and appreciation. This implies that educators are to avoid most forms of formal teaching (Yates 1962: 94).

Different models have been suggested on the teaching of literature to ESL\ EFL students. The way the teacher will use a literary text depends on the model they perceive most appropriate. The cultural model looks at a literary text as a product of culture that can be treated as a source of information about that culture. This approach was often used in universities and it focused on the social, political and historical background to a text in addition to the literary movements and genres. Language work was neglected. Moreover, this approach tends to be teacher-centered (Clandfield 2003: 2).

The language model tends to be more learner-centered. Learners go through a text paying considerable attention to the way language is used. This will help them not only to grasp meaning, but also to enhance the awareness of English. Within this model, the teacher can deal with grammar and vocabulary items or use stylistics for that matter. Using stylistic analyses requires a close study of the linguistic features of the text and this helps students in making the interpretations of the text more meaningful (Clanfield 2003: 2).

The language model highlights the emphasis on language as the medium of literature. This necessarily means that the exposure of students to works of literature will develop their literary competence since literature is made from language. Literary texts are to be used for teaching structures and vocabulary or "language manipulation." This model assumes that literature offers connections to the most creative and subtle uses of the language and this will help students to develop and enrich their language (Carter and Long 1991: 2).

The view of the language model fails to capture the real essence of literature, which is first and foremost an artistic expression created in the first place to communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings. So, if language is to be deemed as the focal point, then one will be ignoring the reader's response to the literary works and therefore, the approach will lead to demotivation and "mechanistic" teaching practices denying the readers the pleasure of reading literature. Furthermore, literature is not going to contribute to the students' emotional development and personal growth (Zafeiriadou 2004: 3).

The personal growth model focuses on the personal engagement of students with the reading of literary texts. Literature is to be treated as a resource which aims to develop students' language competence and literary competence and it is, therefore, best manifested in terms of personal fulfillment and pleasure derived not only from reading a literary text, but also from making it one's own.

The ultimate goal sought, in this case, is to develop a taste and appreciation of literary texts, which would transcend the classroom (Zafeiriadou 2004: 1).

Moreover, the personal growth model entails students to appreciate and evaluate the texts they read as "cultural artifacts" and also to achieve an understanding of their society and themselves as they somehow relate to that "social matrix"(Banegas 2010:1-2);hence, this model is also process-based and tends to be more learner-centered. It stimulates students to draw on their own experiences, opinion and feelings since this model recognizes the tremendous power that literature can have to impact people(Clandfield 2011:2) so much so that texts can be a powerful stimulus for personal growth activities(Savvidou 2004:4).

Accordingly, the role of the instructor is perceived as an educator who facilitates the transmission of knowledge and not as the sole possessor of knowledge endowed with infallibility and occupied with implementing a syllabus rather than making the real communication with the students. The instructor as an enabler steps down from the pedestal and works with students and helps them to read and appreciate literature so as to experience emotional as well as psychological growth. This implies that the instructor is very enthusiastic about the merits of literature and motivates the students in literature by selecting interesting literary texts which can better make literature an interesting collective experience for all (Zafeiriadou 2004: 1).For Prof. Rhett Jones, if an instructor wants to spark discussion, s/he can encourage students to raise their own questions instead of having students answer his/her questions. Moreover, for the sake of stimulating discussion, disagreements and differences can be exaggerated so as to draw more students into it (Jones 2000: 1). Based on the researcher's experience, the above suggestions do not really work with the students of An-Najah University who study English for the following reasons. First, the students expect the lecture to start with some key facts about the literary work assigned to them, and, in most of the cases, they are reluctant to spark the discussion themselves because they are not confident enough to engage in serious and well-founded interpretations of the literary texts they tackle. Second, even the students who carefully read the assigned material fail to connect to the text as they have always been directed towards reading literary texts within the academic setting of literary studies where they deal with critical theories and concepts that they should possess when talking and writing about literary works. Third, An-Najah students still perceive the instructor as the infallible possessor of knowledge, so if change is to be successful, the instructor should be the one who steers the helm. Otherwise, the students will view him\her as an incompetent person who has nothing to say. Therefore, the researcher blended the three models and gave a greater role to the instructor to stimulate interaction and discussions. One of the most effective implementations that the researcher worked with was teaching the students of the History of English Literature II Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess" which went as follows:
-What is love?

-Think about:
- Different types of relationships
- Unrequited love
- Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra…
- Marriage
- Famous couples
- Love for materialistic things
- True love
- Young love
- Create a mind map of words, images and symbols that explain\define what love is.
- After this…
- Create your own concept of love in no more than 15 words.
- In what ways is your definition of love different from the one presented in the poem we are studying? Let us explore the context of "My Last Duchess" and predict the ideas that shape the poem...
- Every dramatic monologue has a speaker.
  The speaker in "My Last Duchess" is a Duke.
  Let's meet this man ...
- What does this man's facial expression tell us?
- What do his clothes reveal?
- Does he look happy?
- Do you think he is arrogant? Why? Why not?
- Why did he kill his wife? Would you do the same if you were in his   place?

After introducing the situation in the poem, students were asked to share their discoveries. They were then asked to analyse the form/structure, language, imagery, rhythm and themes of the poem. Due to the positive feedback given by the students, the researcher was stimulated to carry out the study.

3. Methodology
Study Sample 1
The sample of the study was students of the Department of English at An-Najah National University in the first semester 2005\2006.The group included a section of a course entitled "The Novel and Short Story." The number of students was 51. The target story was Luigi Pirandello's "War."

Instrument 1
In teaching this story, the researcher had three models: the language model, the cultural model and the personal model. The language model can be implemented in the classroom through language-based practice where the texts are treated as resources for literary and linguistic development (Zafeiriadou 2004: 3). This model, I believe, involves so many activities that the essence of the text gets lost since the students will be inevitably involved in looking up the difficult words, not to mention struggling with structure. Concerning the cultural model, the

instructor will be involved in discussing the historical, social and political background, which produced the story. Hence, using the first model burdens the students; using the second makes teaching become more teacher-centered and less relevant to students. The third model lays great pedagogical emphasis on developing the students' critical faculty so as not to become passive recipients but critical readers of the works they tackle (Zafeiriadou 2004: 1).

In teaching the story, the researcher found that the personal growth model can better achieve the desired goals if some modifications were made because leaving the students on their own will not eventually communicate what the writer wanted to say nor will it make language memorable. The instructor should be a catalyst.

The Lesson Plan: Pirandello's "War"
War and Loss
1. Have you ever undergone a painful experience? When? Where? What happened?
2. What does 'loss' remind you of?
3. What kind of war have you witnessed in your country?

Before you read
You are going to read a short story about loss that some parents experienced. It is called "War." Here are some words from the story. Check that you understand what they mean.
- Bulky
- Ventured
- Wriggling
- Uncontrollable sobs.
- Stoic
- Contracted
- Heart-rending

Comprehension
Read the story and answer the questions.
1. Why are the characters of this story unnamed?
2. Who is the protagonist of this story?
3. Is the story about war? What is it really about?

Language Work
1. What words does the author use to describe feelings of suffering or loss?
2. What is the simile that the writer used to describe paternal love?
3. What is the importance of the last sentence?

Discussion
1. Do you like the story?
2. Does the story teach you a moral?

3. Think of some feelings that you feel you should suppress.
4. Have you had a similar experience like that of the old man?

Study Sample 2
The second sample was the students of Poetry in the second semester 2010-2011. The study covered three sections of 124 students.

Instrument 2: Langston Hughes' poem" A Refugee in America"
Words and their associations
1. What does the word 'refugee' mean to you?
2. What associations does 'America' have in your mind?
3. Does America have refugees?

Before you read
You are going to read a poem by a famous American poet. It is called "A Refugee in America."
What do you think the poem will be about?
Here are some words from the poem. Check that you understand their meanings.
-Freedom
- Liberty
- Heart-strings.

Comprehension
Read the poem and answer the questions.
1. What are the differences between freedom and liberty?
2. Does the poet feel that he has either?
3. Why do you think the poet thinks about freedom instead of experiencing it?
4. Why does the word "liberty" make the poet cry? Does it cause you to do the same?
5. What does the poem mean?

Discussion
1. Do you like the poem?
2. How does this poem relate to you as a Palestinian?
3. Think of major things that the Israeli occupation has deprived you of.
4. Have you ever had to suppress any of your dreams or hopes because you are a refugee, or because you don't have freedom or liberty?

        In teaching these two literary works, the instructor used Linda Clandfield's lesson plan with some modifications and the results were promising. The major pedagogic procedure can be summarized as follows:
1. Using the students' interests and feelings as the springboard of understanding Pirandello's "War "and Hughes' "A Refugee in America" by appealing to their experience as people who live under occupation. The students' process of

reasoning was elicited by the questions asked by the instructor, which were to be answered by the student.

2. Placing the story and the poem in their historical background and cultural frame by asking questions about the First World War and The Civil Rights Movement.

3. Building on the first two steps to make the students see the plight of others to make them conclude that literature touches all human beings. At this stage, students ask their own questions.

4. Asking students to describe their own feelings in their own words and then to point out the vocabulary items that touched them deeply because it described their feelings although they were used by the characters of the story.

4. Results

The results of the study can be listed as follows:

1. The language model of teaching literature cannot serve the purpose of teaching literature because students' involvement in doing peripheral activities will lead to the loss of the pleasure of reading and appreciating literature.

2. The cultural model gives the students the impression that they are reading about a culture which is not only irrelevant but also inferior to theirs. Hence, they feel that they are forced to learn it in order to pass their examinations.

3. The personal growth method, though more motivating, needs to be modified to serve the needs of students and to achieve the goals of literature: to appreciate literature, acquire experience which will contribute to personal growth and to extend reading literature outside the classroom. These modifications include making a balance between learner-centered and teacher-centered methods of teaching. The personal growth model assumes that focus should be the interests of students and their own experiences. The desired goal is to develop students' own opinions and to create an interaction between readers and text. The question here is this: can students achieve this if they were left on their own? Depending on the response of the subjects to the instruments, the answer is 'no'.

4. The researcher found that teaching a text should neither be learner- centered nor teacher-centered but a blend of both especially in the domain of literature where students need stimulation and solid background to build on.

5. The question and answer technique should be used when the instructor employs what s/he knows about students' feelings, interests and backgrounds. The instructor can make students

answer his\ her questions to lead them to the idea s\he wants to communicate and ,then, make them ask questions to be answered through discussion with other students and then with the instructor.

6. Students enjoyed and benefited from memorable works of literature, which were adapted by the instructor to suit the needs of students and to appeal to their own situation as Palestinians.

7. When given exams where students can choose one question out of several questions, students answered the ones related to the first and the second instrument and did not choose questions about works of high artistic value,

which they did not find relevant. Therefore, learners feel motivated to read works, which can be adapted to represent their own experience and are demotivated if the instructor presented it as a work of artistic value or as a relic of a foreign culture or even as a text, which can enrich their vocabulary or improve their grammar.

5. Discussion and implications

In teaching literature, instructors often adopt Reinhardt's planning of literature activities, which involves three focal points: What the work is about, what the strengths of that work are and how its different parts connect to the whole (Reinhardt, 2000: 1). But the researcher believes that there are many other possibilities of teaching literature and instructors should be selective in attempting to find ways that are more likely to help students in exploring the literary texts. The subjects of the study showed more interest in reading and discussing the texts when the springboard of the instructor was how this work relates to them and not when the instructor started with what the work is really about. Hence, the first step should be helping students to make the text their own before they are instructed on how it is related to another cultural group. For example, when teaching Langston Hughes' "A Refugee in America," the subjects showed deep interest when asked about the connotation of the word 'refugee' in their own culture and were involved in discussions about its implications. Then, they discussed how one could be a refugee in his own country drawing on their experiences as Palestinians. The second step was to ask questions about the dilemma of the black Americans and how they were treated by the white Americans. Consequently, the subjects saw the plight of the black people and understood that literature is an accumulative human experience.

This implies that literary texts should be selected to appeal to the interests of students because this is the only possible way to make the student appreciate literature and extend his/her knowledge beyond the classroom.

The aim of teaching literature in an EFL context should aim to lead to personal discovery, that is, to inspire in students the pleasure of enjoyment derived from making the text their own. In teaching the subjects of the study Pirandello's "War," the researcher started by asking questions about the martyrs of the Intifada, and the subjects were greatly motivated. Then, through question and answer technique, the students were face to face with the central question of the story: Is there a difference between the feeling of parents who have lost an only child and those who have lost one who has brothers? Then, the concept of patriotism was discussed in general and then addressed in light of the story. Finally, the historical and cultural background of the story was explained. This resulted in positive reception of the story as one which appeals to the current situation of Palestinian students and one which portrays a common human plight. From previous experiences with the story when taught to different subjects, the researcher did not receive the same enthusiastic response because the starting point was what the story was about and what the cultural background was.

In light of the study, it is implied that teaching literature using the suggested model requires a re-examination of set books, and a compilation of material chosen especially for the purpose. The literary texts selected should appeal to the interests and experience of the students.

However, the aim of enriching their experience and developing their imaginative capacity must not be overlooked. Consequently, more research is needed on how to make connections between students and literary texts which are substantially culture bound.

6. Conclusions

The study tried to investigate the best model that achieves the goals of teaching English literature in an EFL context. The procedure used was designing lesson plans for a poem and a short story depending on the personal growth method with some modifications, the most important of which is assigning a more important role for the instructor who comes from the same cultural background. The findings indicated that the subjects engagement in the study showed more interest and appreciation of the instruments when the springboard was the subjects' personal experiences and feelings. This was manifested in the subjects' choice of questions, which were about the instruments. In addition, more discussions and better responses were observed.

Moreover, subjects tended to use and to remember words and expressions, which were expressive in articulating the feelings of the people in the text because they were perceived as sharing in the same plight as the subjects. It was the instructor who produced this deep impact on the students because they were given the aid necessary to make personal connections to the instruments. This emerges from the belief of the researcher that the instructor is the one who can help the students to perceive the power of using literary texts to achieve personal growth and academic development.

Re-examining strategies of literature instruction becomes a necessity in this rapidly changing world. This requires developing a multi-faceted model, which neither focuses on language skills only nor does it use texts as capsules for a culture that students perceive as inferior or at best irrelevant. However, the researcher is not at all undermining the vital role of students in achieving the desired goals of literature instruction. The role of the students is reinforced by an instructor who helps students to enhance their literary competence through presenting a variety of texts that are familiar and meet students' needs and interests.

* Iman Morshed Hammad, Lecturer
Department of English Language and Literature
An-Najah National University
Nablus, P.O. Box: 7
Palestine
E-mail: iman_hammad2@yahoo.com

References

Allen, Wendy. (1985). 'Towards cultural proficiency.' In Alice Omaggio (Ed.). *Proficiency, Curriculum, Articulation: The Ties that Bind*, 137-166. Middlebury, VT: Northeast Conference.

Banegas, Dario. (2010). 'The Role of Literature in ELT. ' London: British Council.

Carter, Ronald and Michael Long. (1991). *Teaching Literature*. London: Longman.

Clandfield, Lindsay. (2004).'The Road not Taken.' *The Onestop Magazine.* Macmillan. http ://www.onestopenglish 5005.file. (Retrieved on 11 November 2012.**)**

_____. (2004). 'Using literature in teaching English as a foreign \ second language.' *The Onestop Magazine*. Macmillan. http //www.onestopenglish.com. (Retrieved on11 November 2012**)**

_____. (2011). 'Teaching material: using literature in the EFL\ ESL classroom.' *The   Onestop   Magazine*.   Macmillan. http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/methodology/teaching-materials/teaching-materials-using-literature-in-the-efl/-esl-   classroom/ 146508. article (Retrieved on 18\11\2012)

Clouston, Michael. (1997) . ' Towards an understanding of culture in L2\FL Education.'   *The   Internet   TESL   Journal.III,   (5).* http://iteslj.org/Articles/Lessard-Clouston-Culture.html (Retrieved on 17 November, 2012)

Jones, Rhett. (2000). 'Could the questions be the answer?' *The Teaching Exchange*, 4 (2): 1-3.

Matikaainen, Tiina and Duffy Carolyn. (2000). 'Developing Cultural Understanding.' *Forum,* 38, 3: 40-53.

Plastina, Anna Franca. (2000). 'Teaching culture in literature in the ESL\EFL classroom.'   *The   Internet   TESL   Journal*,   VI,   3: http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Plastina- Culture In Literature/ (Retrieved on 11 November, 2012)

Reinhardt, May. (2000). 'Teaching literature: when less is more'. Lesley University, Massachusetts. 1-7. http://www.lesley.edu/academic_centers/ hood/currents/v3n1/reinhardt.html.(Retrieved on 17 November, 2012)

Savvidou, Christine. (2004). 'An integrated approach to teaching literature in the EFL classroom.' *The Internet TESL Journal*, X, 12, December: http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Savvidou-Literature.html (Retrieved on 11 November, 2012)

Shanhan, David. (1997).'Articulating the relationship between language, literature and culture: toward a new agenda for foreign language teaching and research.' *Modern Language Journal,81,2:*164-74.

Tang, Ramona. (1999). 'The place of culture in the foreign language classroom: A reflection.' *The Internet TESL Journal*, 3, 8: 1-4.

Yates, Chris. (1962). 'Syllabuses and examinations: English literature in schools and the training of teacher of English overseas'. *The Teaching of English Literature Overseas.* London: Methuen.

Zafeiriadou, Nelly. (2001) . 'On literature in the EFL classroom.' : July/Sept: 24. http://www.developingteachers.com/articles_tchtraining/lit3_nelly.htm (Retrieved on 11 November, 2012)