

Dear Megan,

What you learned from the assigned materials and class activities for the week?

Nothing new, really. Now now now, I know this question is heavily emphasized in pedagogical circles surrounding constructivism, but this question really, really sucks.

Well, why does it suck? Well, there is science and an art to asking questions. Good instruction, engaging dialogue, fruitful discussion, and meaningful knowledge acquisition really centers around one thing—**questions**.

It's much easier to answer *good questions*, then ask them. Conversely, it's much harder to answer *shallow questions*, then ask them.

But wait, this isn't an insult, it's feedback. There is a kernel of truth, as being able to review and contextualize what you learned is a very important question. However, it's like asking, "What was your favorite part of your vacation?"

Now, you definitely want to know the amazing parts of someone's vacation, but this is such a lazy way to do so. It places all the burden of contextualizing, recalling, and ranking of things on the one being asked. This is a lot of work, and unless the person is unusually practiced in story telling, then the answer you are most likely to get is... "the food!" Ahhhhhh—BORING!

Similarly, asking what a lazy question like "what did you learn" is a lot to ask, as awareness of what you did not know at the time, what you learned, what you remember, how you learned, and the transition between the states is really only gained with hindsight and contextualization in future applications in a relevant domain. This means it is *very unlikely* that one will be able to articulate what one has learned.

Thus, you are (most likely) going to get a minimal response, just good enough to satisfy the request of the inquirer. A good instructor is one who understands the subject deeply enough and remembers the experience of learning itself. They then are able to use said own expertise and experience to prod and ask the *right questions*, such that, they allow for the revisiting of the revelations and experiences of the one being asked in such a way that it almost feels impossible to not share.

Again, to emphasize the nuance in this point: the general goal of the question is noble and just, taking the initiate and being able to review/explain what and how you learned is an incredibly useful skill that is hard. What I'm refuting is that a good instructor/interviewer/discussion partner is one whom can make the processes deceptively easy via the use of good questions.

Nature Journal

One of the most valuable insights gained through meditations of this sort is the awareness of attention itself. We feel that we are observing from some central point, and a hard, yet valuable exercise, is to briefly turn attention upon itself. Observe what is observing.

What I found is that there is nothing to observe, no center, no head. Instead, everything observed is attention itself.