

The Practice of Critical Thinking Training in an English Reading Course

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Abstract: There is an increasing demand for English talents' comprehensive qualities at home and abroad in the process of globalization. And in addition to listening, speaking, reading and writing, the skills of critical thinking, innovation and solving problems independently are also essential. Yet long time's oversized emphasis on language knowledge and skills training has led to an absence of "speculation" for English majors. Taking English reading course as an example to conduct critical thinking training, the model of "reading - debate - writing" can be applied by asking students to organize an English debate on the basis of fully reading and discussing, and finally to write a composition to consolidate and sublimate the results of the previous reading and debate. And this model can fully mobilize students' subjective initiative, and raise the level of English while improving the critical thinking ability.

Keywords: Reading; Critical thinking; English debat

1. Introduction

The word "critical" comes from the Greek language, and critical thinking, as a way of thinking, can be traced back to the ancient Greek philosopher Socratic's questioning. Dewey, modern critical thinking representative, put forward the "reflective thinking", which is a concept of skills. However, the modern sense of critical thinking concept was first proposed in the United States in the 1980s. Then the American Philosophy Society defined critical thinking as "purposeful, self-regulating judgment. Its manifestations are explanations, analyzes, evaluations, inferences, and the introduction of evidence, concepts, methods, standards, or contexts in which the judgment is based." [1] Critical thinking is the thinking methods and abilities of analyzing, judging, inferring and reconstructing, and these abilities and methods can be improved through training. Since 1993, the US government has combined critical thinking courses with higher education and subject teaching as a education goal of colleges or universities. Canada and other countries also set up courses in colleges and universities. In 1998, UNESCO published the World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century: Ideas and Actions, the Article 1 of which regards developing critical and independent attitudes as one of the tasks of higher education, training and research.

In contrast, some people think that China's education and scholarship lack of critical thinking, however, the concept of critical thinking in Chinese history can be traced back to the five scholarship steps discussed in the Western Han Dynasty's Confucian classics *Ritual Records · Doctrine of the Mean*: inquire thoroughly,

ponder prudently, discriminate clearly and practice devotedly, from which it can be inferred that the ancient Chinese scholars paid much attention to the questioning and critical thinking ability. Recently, in 2016 Tsinghua University introduced the C program (social enterprises committed to the critical thinking education), launched a series of workshops on "how to apply critical thinking to teaching", to promote the introduction of critical thinking courses in colleges and universities. Qian Yingyi, the dean of SEM, Tsinghua University also held a series of lectures and forums on critical thinking, using practical action to promote the dissemination and application of critical thinking.

2. Development Status of Critical Thinking in English Major Students

Chinese English major teaching constantly adapt to the historical trend of reform, in 1999, He Qixin and Huang Yuansheng proposed the importance of cultivating the thinking ability and innovation ability of English major students in *Several Opinions on Reform of the Foreign Language Majors' Undergraduate Education*. [3] Each subject has its relatively unique mode of thinking, it is generally recognized that English major pays much attention on long-term language skills training, ignoring thinking ability training. The survey report of Wei Xiaobao [4] shows that "the evaluation of foreign language major students on their critical thinking ability is not high." In the curriculum setting of English major, the courses about language knowledge and language skills occupy an important seat, students carry out long-term reception learning, excessive memory, imitation, repeat and other

mechanical labor squeeze the depth thinking time of their brain, limiting the development of critical thinking. "The training goals focus on training talents in English, and rarely take into account other qualities needed in the cultivation of comprehensive talents, especially the ability of thinking, innovation, independent solution to the problem...In the teaching methods, they focus on recitation, memory, imitation, repeat and other mechanical mental work, contempt or neglect the discussion and debate which are conducive to the development of thinking ability and encourage independent thinking." Huang Yuan-shen said, which points out the serious thinking absent of English major. In order to meet the comprehensive requirements of the comprehensive quality of English major students in the process of globalization, it is imperative to reform English courses. On the basis of pre-reform, English teaching should encourage discussion and debate, focusing on cultivating ability of thinking, innovation and independent solution to problems.

The tradition reading teaching of English major focus on knowledge explanation, discourse analysis, reading skills training, style appreciation, the restatement of original content and so on. In these repetitive memory training, generally students do not think about, question, infer and judge the information in the text, they accept blindly, and have little their own unique insights, even if they have some views, which are common sense, lacking of depth and breadth. Generally speaking, this kind of teacher-based, student-assisted appreciation reading teaching seriously hinder the English major students' effective play on critical thinking, affecting the comprehensive training of comprehensive quality of foreign language talents. Zhang Jie believes that "reading is not only to grasp the basic content of the text, which is called low-level reading; the more important thing is to analyze, conclude, ratiocinate and judge the reading text to understand the content of the text and the author's point of view objectively and impartially to achieve a higher level of reading. In order to cultivate students' critical thinking, we must guide students to change from low-level reading to high-level reading, surpass the surface knowledge memory, to achieve depth learning. On the basis of text interpretation, we should teach students to conclude, ratiocinate and judge, distinguish between facts and views, to determine the author's purpose and tone, question the illogic part, to come to a logical conclusion objectively and fairly. To guide students to do this, the personal qualities of teachers are also very important. At present, English teachers' critical thinking ability and consciousness are generally not high, "they are not clear about the concept of thinking and its connotation, lack of ideas and skills to integrate critical thinking activities and content into the classroom." So in the reading class, teachers should also change ideas to develop their own critical thinking consciously to carry out reflection and innova-

tion from the traditional appreciation reading teaching, to use the effective teaching methods to develop students' critical thinking, and to progress with students together.

3. The Practice of "Reading - Debate - Writing" Mode - A Case Study of Sophomore of English Major in Yibin University

In the mode of "reading - debate - writing" used in English reading class, writing is only an auxiliary tool for consolidating and sublimating the results of pre-reading and debates, not as a key research object. And why use the means of debate, how to debate in the classroom is the main problem to explore. Debate is a direct and effective tool for training critical thinking. Ancient Greek philosopher he Socrates' socratic dialogue can be said to be the origin of the debate, and Shilu pointed out that "the English debate is highly valued in Western countries, and the debate is very common, the establishment of campus, society and political claims is resolved through debate. The principles of debate - critical thinking is the basis of their thinking patterns and the patterns of their lives and management. The West has a good tradition of debate from the questioning of Socrates, and it can solve the problems in the academic, court, diplomatic, commercial and other social activities through the debate and other forms. The television debate in the US presidential election process is a typical example. In short, the debate is a kind of thinking and language activity, which itself is the practice of critical thinking. The two sides of the debate hold the opposite positions on the same object or view, and then they start the debate, in the continuous ideological confrontation and conflict, they dig out the facts explained by each other or loopholes of another side's view, expose each other's contradictions, trying to prove the correctness of their own arguments. It can be seen that the debate has directly trained the ability if thinking, questioning, rebutting and judging in multiple ways. Compared to the plane reading, debate can raised the contradictory and conflict to the height of tit-for-tat quickly, to make the two views collide more intensely, so that make the text of the plane burst out of fresh vitality through the language.

So how to use the tool - debate to develop critical thinking effectively in English reading class?

3.1. Preparation before the debate

The goal of the classroom debate is to serve the teaching, it is not the formal debate contest, the rules and the process of the debate can be adjusted accordingly. The teacher Zhang Jie organized a classroom English debate, she divided 30 students into two groups, each group has 15 people, in the argument and conclusion part, the teacher designated students, in the process, the students can debate freely. She also believes that although the

class has reached the purpose of participation, but the classroom order is chaotic. If we want to achieve better results, the mode of operation should be improved. It is advisable to keep the classroom debate in line with the steps of the general debate, to make the whole process more orderly and more efficient, so that to feel the classroom is not too chaotic and easy to prepare for the debate in the preparation week. There is a case study of sophomore of English major in Yibin University – there are 30 people in a class, each time 10 people is selected directly to join in the debate, 4 people is the affirmative, 4 people is the negative, 2 people is the presenters (one men and one women, the teacher retreated behind as the general judge), the remaining 20 students are the judges. The time for debate preparation usually takes a week, the teacher organizes students to watch the national English debate video in advance, so that students are familiar with the debate process, learning English debate language and debate skills, to stimulate students' desire to debate. In addition, students are recommended to read critical thinking and logic books to help them do psychological and theoretical preparation.

After the teacher gives the debate question, the affirmative and the negative divide their central points into a number of strong operational issues respectively through the form of group cooperation to collect relevant information from the textbooks, newspapers, magazines and networks. Because "we live in an era of information explosion, a lot of information is unreliable, distorted or even wrong," when selecting the useful information in massive information, you must analyze, question, infer and evaluate carefully, to select and integrate the useful information in limited time, only to carry out low-level reading is not enough, students should carry out high-level reading through critical thinking to make reasonable judgments and decision-making objectively and impartially, sorting out logical points and arguments and writing article about argument. In this process, the students carry out critical reading and select reasonable and effective information from the massive material. They find the problem actively around the argument, question the reliability of the argument, put forward and solve the problem, carry out a lot of reduction from a conflicting point of view and compare its feasibility repeatedly. Then, they carry out the group internal simulation debate, through personal practice, they guess the other side's argument and ideas to find out the loopholes in thinking and prepare multiple sets programs to deal with it, the whole process also cultivates the students' collective loyalty and sense of competition.

In addition to the debaters, the remaining 20 judges also need to do some research around the debate, seriously record the debate of each debater in the process, and critically analyze their strengths and weaknesses. In the audience questioning, they need to take an active part in to

lay a good foundation for the next direct participation in the debate. The task of the presenters is to describe the debate question briefly and introduce the basic situation of the affirmative and the negative, write string words, and carry out brainstorming to stimulate everyone's interest in the debate and create a positive atmosphere to guide the smooth progress of the debate. In this way, during the preparation of the week, all the students are involved and changed the habit of passive learning to the greatest extent.

3.2. Classroom debate process

The entire debate process does not have to be very strict in accordance with the timing of each step, in case of difficult problems or disputes, the presenters or teacher can carry out spot treatment. In order to solve problems and develop critical thinking, appropriate extension of time is allowed

Debate process:

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Presenters' opening remarks (introduce the debate question and debaters, organize the whole process) (2 minutes)

Argument.

The first debater of the affirmative gives the argument. (2-3 minutes)

The first debater of the negative gives the argument. (2-3 minutes)

Attack.

The second debater of the affirmative attack the second and third debater of the negative (3 minutes)

The second debater of the negative attack the second and third debater of the affirmative (3 minutes)

Summary of attack.

A summary of the first debater of the affirmative. (1-2 minutes)

A summary of the first debater of the negative. (1-2 minutes)

Free debate. 8 debaters are involved, the two sides give speech alternately (10 minutes)

The audience (the judges) ask the debaters. But also express their views freely. (15 minutes)

Summary of the debate.

The fourth debater of the affirmative summarize the argument. (2-3 minutes)

The fourth debater of the negative summarize the argument. (2-3 minutes)

Comments

Student judges carry out comments, vote for a best team and select the best debater of each team respectively.

The teacher carry out comments, solve difficult problems in the debate, the teacher can also participate in the vote for the best debater and team.

Judges comments and votes can refer to the following points:

Whether the question analysis is accurate, whether the logic is strict, whether it is justified.

The use and expression of English language knowledge.

Logical thinking, rebuttal ability.

Spot response.

Team cooperation.

Debate style: expression, grace.

3.3. The consolidation after the debate - essay writing

After the end of the debate, the tightened strings of students will be alleviated temporarily, so the teacher should strike while the iron is hot to ask every student to write a 400 words or more self-thesis argument around the debate to make the knowledge obtained from the entire process of debate to be consolidated and sublimated. For example, through the debate in this lesson, students can write the importance of talented talent; the shape of hard work for a good writer; two elements of successful writing; genius and hard work and so on. Whether the information they collected carefully or the distinctive ideas proposed by debaters are the precious writing materials, at the same time they should not ignore the comments of the student judges and teachers, which is the interpretation and analysis of the article point of view, is the carding and evaluation on the drastic debate. When facing a large amount of information input from different parties, we must use a critical eye to select valuable, persuasive arguments and draw inspiration from those wonderful debate. The more intense the debate, the deeper the discussion of the problem, the more conducive to writing a depth and breadth writing. In this way, the wonderful debate in the classroom is shown in written form again, which completes the change of entire debate class from written language (reading) - spoken (listening and speaking) - written (writing), this multitasking conversion not only enhance the critical reading and writing skills, but

also train and improve the English language skills and English thinking ability of the students.

4. Conclusions

In summary, English teachers extract the debate questions which are adapted with the students' level from the reading materials, and organize the students to read the original material, collect and analyze extra-curricular information, to carry out group discussions around the debate, then conduct the English debate, and finally consolidate pre-reading and the results of debate in the form of writing. This kind of "reading - debate - writing" reading class mode not only can expand the students' knowledge and cultural vision, enrich the classroom teaching mode, but also can create a real language application environment for students, developing their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and using the knowledge. In practice, the specific problems faced by the teaching model need to be further improved. Therefore, in teaching practice English teachers should improve their own professional level and critical thinking actively, continue to find problems and solve problems innovatively.

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