

The Significance and Strategies of Cultivating Students' Critical Thinking Ability in English Teaching

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Abstract

The goal of English Curriculum in senior high school is to change from comprehensive language application ability to the cultivation of subject core quality. Thinking quality is one of the core qualities of the four university subjects. As an important component and manifestation of thinking quality, critical thinking training has been attached great importance in the reform of senior high school English curriculum. However, in the current situation of senior high school English teaching, there are still many problems in the cultivation of critical thinking. English teachers should pay special attention to the cultivation of students' critical thinking ability. The development of critical thinking can promote the improvement of students' overall quality. In English teaching, we should renew our educational ideas, change our teaching ideas, improve our English teaching strategies of teaching and adopt process evaluation to cultivate and improve students' critical thinking ability.

Keywords

critical thinking; cultivation; significance; strategy.

1. Introduction

Twenty-first century is a century with rapid development of knowledge economy and it is in urgent need of talents of great creativity to satisfy the needs of social development. Developing students' critical thinking ability plays an important part in cultivating innovative talents of high quality. Therefore, how to cultivate students' critical thinking ability is the first and foremost task for English teachers in senior high school.

2. The Definition of Critical Thinking

Due to the different fields and research perspectives, there is no unified understanding of the definition of critical thinking in academia. From a philosophical point of view, Ennis points out that critical thinking is "rational and reflective thinking about what we believe or do". From the perspective of cognitive psychology, Sternberg defined critical thinking as "the psychological process, strategy and representation that people use to solve problems, make decisions and learn new concepts". In addition, there are two more representative definitions, Paul and Elder point out that critical thinking is a process of analyzing and evaluating thinking to improve thinking ability. The research of pedagogy is represented by Bloom, who divides cognitive process into six dimensions: memory, understanding, application, analysis, evaluation and creation, of which the latter three are generally considered as the representatives of critical thinking. Through repeated consultation and investigation of 46 experts of "Delphi project team", Facione put forward the "Delphi" report of critical thinking, in which the definition of critical thinking is generally accepted at present. According to the report, critical thinking is defined as a purposeful, self-adjusting judgment, which can be expressed in the form of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, as well as the

arguments, concepts, methods, standards and backgrounds on which interpretation and consideration are based. This definition includes critical thinking skills and critical thinking tendency. In general, what we talk about in the teaching field refers to critical thinking skills. It can be seen from the above definitions of critical thinking in different fields that the cultivation of critical thinking is inseparable from the analysis, evaluation, re integration and creation of new and old information by thinkers. It requires learners to be able to form their own views through independent thinking based on the information they have mastered, and to make a reflective evaluation of the formed views.

3. The Current Situation of Cultivating Critical Thinking in English Teaching

In the current situation of senior high school English teaching, the practice of cultivating students' critical thinking is not ideal. The existing problems mainly lie in the following two aspects. Firstly, the traditional teaching mode is still the main teaching mode in English class, lacking the teaching mode of cultivating critical thinking ability. Through a questionnaire survey of teachers, the author finds that the current English classroom teaching in senior high school is mainly based on the traditional teaching mode, and teachers' teaching still occupies most of the class time. In order to achieve the ideal teaching effect, most of the English teachers use both Chinese and English in class, and even in the third year of senior high school, they mainly use Chinese directly. Although with the vigorous development of the new curriculum reform, the Ministry of Education has put forward the core quality of disciplines, which stipulates that the purpose of education is to cultivate people with all-round development, however, most of the teachers still think that English learning in high school should mainly focus on the learning of language points and the mastery of grammar knowledge. Therefore, most of the time in the ordinary English class is focused on the explanation of key words, phrases and sentence patterns, as well as a large quantity of exercises in various forms. After the training of this teaching mode, students' ability to take the examination is improved. However, the comprehensive ability of students can not be improved and developed. Some teachers tend to use task-based teaching method in English teaching. It is a good teaching breakthrough to lead students to find answers or guide students to explore their own problems by analyzing the articles. But without hierarchy and logic, students' thinking cannot be divergent, and their comprehensive ability, especially critical thinking ability, cannot be improved. Secondly, the evaluation method of teachers' teaching is single, and the main method is quantitative evaluation. Influenced by the current education concept, teaching mode and the severe situation of college entrance examination, the evaluation of students in senior high school English teaching is still based on the quantitative evaluation reflected in the form of test papers. Moreover, in the interview with teachers, some teachers also talked about combining the test scores with the students' classroom performance and their homework. However, the proportion of students' classroom performance and homework performance is very low. Teachers and students pay less attention to this aspect. The way of evaluation directly determines the teaching of teachers and the learning of students.

The main reasons leading to these problems are as follows. First of all, in the current examination oriented education environment, it is not conducive for teachers to provide open teaching for students. In order to meet the needs of college entrance examination and meet the rigid requirements of college entrance examination for language knowledge, most of the teachers' time in class is used to explain and impart knowledge points to students, or to explain topics. Teachers seldom have time to use the critical thinking features in textbooks or exercises to stimulate students' critical thinking. In order to save teaching time, teachers only

teach language knowledge and ignore the cultivation of students' thinking quality. Secondly, students have not fully realized the importance of critical thinking, they do not understand the relationship between critical thinking and their college entrance examination, and personal development. Students only know how to overcome the difficulty of language knowledge, recite words and do reading constantly, so as to get high marks in the college entrance examination. Moreover, the students have also been used to the teaching method of teachers' cramming. They think that it is a waste of time if teachers don't talk about knowledge points in class. It is very difficult for teachers to correct students' misconceptions in a short period of time. In addition, the lack of teachers' critical thinking quality is also a very important reason. In order to cultivate students' critical thinking ability in English classroom teaching, teachers should have higher critical thinking quality. Only in this way can teachers be able to guide students, analyze students' explicit behavior and give suggestions to students. However, according to the questionnaire survey, most English teachers are still lack of critical thinking ability. Finally, in the current education field, for how to cultivate students' critical thinking in the specific teaching practice, how to take the training of students' four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing as a whole, lack of systematic teaching mode guidance. Teachers with this awareness are only exploring and crossing the river by feeling the stones, lacking practical and practical education cases for reference.

4. The Significance of Developing Students' Critical Thinking Ability

Critical thinking ability means making personal judgment of the authenticity, accuracy and value of what are learned. And then make rational decisions about what to do and what to believe. Critical thinking is not simply denying everything, but it is a way of thinking. It is a critical reflection based on respect for others, and further make discoveries and innovations on this basis. Thus, developing students' critical thinking ability can make a great difference to cultivating students' spirits of innovation, improving students' innovative ability as well as developing students' creative personality.

4.1. Critical Thinking Ability is the Basis of Cultivating Students' Innovative Thinking

Cultivating students' critical thinking is conducive to inspiring students to break the shackles of traditional thinking and thinking mode. It may build up the students' confidence to be different and help them judge traditional or authoritative intellectual conclusions with a spirit of bold skepticism. In the process of developing critical thinking ability, students can form into a habit of active, independent, critical thinking manner.

4.2. Critical Thinking Ability is the Basis of Cultivating Students' Personality

Modern education put great emphasis on developing students' personality and cultivating students potentials. Critical thinking ability is a crucial factor in the process of personality development. A student without critical thinking ability may find it hard to tell right from wrong. Developing critical thinking skills enables students to acquire the knowledge, skills and experience necessary for self-development in a logical and critical manner. In the process of obtaining information, analyzing information and processing information, students' abilities of independent learning, independent practice and independent inquiry should be improved, and independent learning strategies should be mastered gradually, which lays a solid foundation for students' personalized development.

4.3. Critical Thinking Guides Students to Construct Scientific Values

The cultivation of critical thinking helps guide students to distinguish right from wrong in social practice and stick to correct value orientation. Using critical perspectives, students may

be able to to identify perspectives in real value conflicts, and refine perspectives in inquiry activities. In the end, rational criticism will provide a newer and closer guide to the truth for personal practice and lay a cognitive foundation for the improvement of one's political literacy.

5. The Strategies of Developing Students' Critical Thinking Ability

To cultivate students' critical thinking ability, English teachers in high school must change the traditional educational concept, study and absorb the essence of modern advanced educational theory. Besides, teachers are supposed to learn from advanced educational thoughts and teaching methods at home and abroad, explore new evaluation models, and improve students' practical ability.

5.1. Renew the Educational Idea and Construct the Harmonious Teacher-Student Relationship

In classroom teaching, to train students to be critical thinkers, English teachers should first change their educational ideas and become an equal partner of students in critical dialogue, a promoter and helper of students' independent and cooperative learning. Teachers should encourage students to question, guess and explore boldly, and dare to express different opinions from teachers. Teachers should praise and reward students who carry out critical evaluation in class, even if their evaluation is not correct and mature. In the process of education and teaching, teachers should respect every student, especially care about students with learning difficulties, and change from blaming them blindly to letting them experience the happiness of success. Teachers should try their best to stimulate students' interest in learning, encourage them to try to carry out a variety of cooperative learning activities, and cultivate their sense of mutual learning and joint exploration. Building up a harmonious teacher--student relationship may provide a proper environment in which students' critical thinking ability can be developed.

5.2. Change Teaching Ideas and Create an Innovative Atmosphere

English teaching in classroom is the main environment of cultivating students' ability and plays an important role in developing students' critical thinking. Therefore, in teaching practice, teachers should not only scientifically design and plan teaching activities but also change the traditional "explaining without stop" teaching method into an open learning method that cultivates students' autonomy, cooperation and inquiry. According to the psychological characteristics of teenagers who are willing to communicate with others and express themselves, teachers can organize them to have discussions and debates in a planned way in the process of English teaching. First of all, regular discussion activities can be carried out to enable students to participate in teaching activities with a equal and peaceful mind, so as to lay a psychological foundation for the development of students' critical thinking potential. The teacher may combine the teaching content to choose the topic which the student is interested in to inspire the students to carry on the discussion from the different perspectives, and encourages the students to boldly expresses own opinions. Secondly, targeted debate activities can be carried out to activate the inspiration of students' thinking and criticism and improve their ability of deep thinking and multi-level analysis. At the end of the debate, teachers should summarize the views of both sides, and help students to evaluate and reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of their views, leading to a convincing conclusion. Debate activities play an important role in promoting the development of students' critical thinking.

5.3. Optimize the Teaching Design and Expand the Space of Using Critical Thinking

Teachers can give full play to the advantages of advanced teaching methods, optimize classroom teaching design, and expand the space for students to use critical thinking ability. First of all, teachers can use computer multimedia tools, such as PPT or Flash and other teaching AIDS to create a situation, such as natural, social and cultural situations to cultivate students' ability of observation and analysis. Secondly, teachers can organize students to carry out cooperative inquiry learning with the help of network information learning environment and various digital resources. students should be encouraged to conduct in-depth discussions and explore social and cultural issues through dialogue, discussion and debate. At last, teachers should encourage students to develop the habit of critical thinking in the process of collecting, combing and integrating information. Thirdly, teachers can use information technology to carry out independent learning activities according to the individual differences of students, so as to promote the development of students' personality and stimulate their innovative potential.

5.4. Advocate Process Evaluation and Pay Attention to the Cultivation of Critical Thinking Ability

Scientific and reasonable evaluation methods can effectively motivate students to be unconventional and achieve excellent results, so as to achieve good teaching results. In the background of quality education, teachers should focus on the whole process of students' learning, paying attention to the fact that learning interest, learning method, cognitive style and emotional attitude and other factors play an important role in cultivating students' thinking ability. At the same time, teachers can use multiple evaluation model to cultivate students' being courageous to explore and innovative thinking habits. For example, teachers may combine their evaluation with students' self-evaluation, students' mutual evaluation and parents' evaluation and adopt multi-level and multi-standard evaluation methods to make an assessment of different students. Through evaluation, students at different levels can experience the joy brought by criticism and innovation. Through this way, students are expected to know themselves, build self-confidence, form an independent critical awareness and ability, and ultimately achieve their own comprehensive development.

The cultivation of students' critical thinking ability is a gradual process, a process of synchronous development with knowledge, ability and quality, and a systematic project, which needs educators' unremitting effort and ceaseless exploration. As long as we adhere to the scientific concept of education, and strive to go ahead with the spirit of practice, we will be able to cultivate more innovative talents in line with the requirements of the new century development.

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