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Developing Students' Critical Thinking Skills in EFL Classes

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ANNOTATION

This article provides a brief overview of critical thinking, the definitions of the concept of critical thinking, the elements of the formation of critical thinking, its principles, as well as practical issues related to the ways of developing critical thinking among students through reading newspapers in English classes.

KEYWORDS: critical thinking, reading newspapers.

Introduction

Critical thinking was studied in many aspects as a psychological and pedagogical phenomenon. The process of formation of critical thinking is considered within the framework of the problem of the development of students' thinking in the educational space, which is directly related to the aspect of the activation of cognitive activity was reflected in many research works by many scholars worldwide. Critical thinking in teaching activity is perceived as a set of qualities and skills that determine a high level of research culture of a student and a teacher, as well as “evaluative, reflective thinking”, for which knowledge is not the final, but the starting point, reasoned and logical thinking, which based on personal experience and verified facts. D. Kluster identifies four aspects that determine the specifics of critical thinking in comparison with other types of thinking:

- critical thinking encourages the student to independence and creative activity;
- the motivation for critical thinking is the level of educational and professional knowledge;
- critical thinking contains a certain problem, as well as the exact formulation of the issue to be resolved and the choice of the only correct and accurate argumentation, which is unacceptable without knowledge and use of the foundations of logic;
- critical thinking has a social nature.

Materials and Methods

While studying at a university, students form a dynamic basis for their educational and professional activities, professionalization of memory, thinking, perception and other cognitive processes at the lessons. Reality shows that critical literacy and critical thinking are difficult to incorporate into the process of learning English as a foreign language, as this often exceeds the capabilities of students. According to Diana Halpern, “only 25% of first-year students have the skills necessary for logical thinking cited in her book *The Psychology of*

Critical Thinking (Halpern, 2000). Developing and educating a student as a person who is able to critically evaluate his work, analyze the thoughts of other authors, we always ask ourselves the question of what critical thinking is. Definitely, this is a complex concept due to the fact that people perceive information differently in the context of the existence of intercultural and interethnic differences, peculiarities of logic, thinking, etc., therefore, the same facts or events are considered from different perspectives and the conclusions are opposite.

By critical thinking, students mean a combination of abilities and attitudes. Ability is a cognitive element that gives an idea of what needs to be done, and student disposition is one or another attitude or inclination that forms critical thinking in a certain direction. The authors agree that it is necessary to focus on the theoretical and epistemological views of students, giving them the opportunity to actively learn, using tasks related to real life and encouraging interaction between students in-group work to create the opportunity for them to communicate with each other and exchange different points of view. In this case, teachers face an urgent task, which consists in organizing work in the classroom in a new way. Students should have time to find an approach to solving the problem, posing adequate questions, considering hypotheses, and putting forward reasonable arguments. At this stage, the methods of the teacher's work play a decisive role in the formation of students' critical thinking. There is a widespread misconception that students learn exclusively through teacher-student information transmission. In this case, it can be rightly argued that students are not interested in working together and exchanging ideas, since they work under control. On the contrary, discussions and the formulation of one's own judgments stimulate the intellectual development of students, which contributes to a better understanding of ideas, including scientific ones.

Let us especially emphasize that there is a circumstance that we should not forget: the text in English is a cultural source of values, the meaning of which is determined by a particular historical era. In other words, the author is not a neutral person, but a person with his own culture, knowledge, intentions, actions that are reflected in the text, and each reader interprets the author's ideas, guided by his own critical point of view. Knowledge is always contextual, and readers construct their understanding from worldly and cultural perspectives based on their own life experiences. Thus, critical thinking will always depend on a whole complex of socio-cultural factors and be characterized by situational conditioning. It is the ability to critically analyze texts and argumentation that help the reader understand the author's ideas and go "beyond the text", draw conclusions, thereby forming a person armed with new knowledge and able to fight and defend his civic position in our contradictory world.

According to Matthew Arnold, critical thinking is "an impartial desire to learn and disseminate everywhere the best of what you have learned, what you have learned, what you think about, using your knowledge." (Arnold, 2006). Considering this definition of critical thinking to be the only correct one, Professor Hayes encourages teachers to teach the best that they themselves know and think about (Hayes, 2014). Thus, teachers should engage students in critical discussions about what concerns not themselves, but those problems that exist in the world.

There are basic principles of critical thinking: reflection, transformation, action; focus on the problem and its complexity; dynamic strategies adapted to the context in which they are used; rejection of banality through a deep study of the issue from different points of view. Since each text, especially a newspaper, has its own individual characteristics, in addition to the above principles, it is necessary to highlight secondary skills that allow you to: distinguish fact from opinion, interpret the connotations of words, reveal the author's point of view, recognize distorted and erroneous thinking, discover means propaganda, draw conclusions, conclusions (Jeong, 2012).

Turning to the practical part of our work, we need to emphasize the invaluable role of the printed word. Why do teachers and students prefer to choose newspaper rather than book texts for analytical reading? It is easy to answer this question: articles from printed sources are topical, diverse, and easily accessible. During discussions and debates and other forms of discussion, they allow you to develop not only critical thinking, but also improve the skills of all types of speech activity: speaking, listening, writing, reading.

Here are other advantages of using newspaper material in English classes: diversity, gradation of difficulty levels, consideration of socio-cultural, political, economic and other topics, contextual reading, text design in literary English, the ability to look at the text analytically, interaction with other students through hypotheses, the possibility of individual interpretation of facts. Among the above advantages of using newspaper material in the classroom, the most significant factor for all those who study English as a foreign language is the literary language in which the articles are written.

The advantage of using newspaper material in the classroom is obvious, since in this case a critical vision of a particular fact or event is encouraged, which leads to the creation of a special creative atmosphere in the classroom, which we have already written about above. The teacher has an urgent need to learn more about the interests of his students in order to correctly orient himself in the selection of material for analytical reading or other types of activities for the formation of critical thinking, which we will write about below. The most important condition for success in this work is to increase the level of students' motivation to read the press. The choice of a newspaper depends not only on the interests of students, their level of proficiency and the educational goals set for them. Such an opportunity, in particular, is provided by The Times newspaper. We present actions that a student should follow when working on an article and developing their own opinion about what they have read

- 1) information about the article: before you start reading the article, you need to know all the data about the journal, the author, etc.;
- 2) information about the analysis: it is necessary to study the article as a whole and try to determine what goals the author has set, what readership the article is intended for; look for clues in the title and/or subtitle before reading;
- 3) the main details: find the statement of the question, the thesis statement of the author, and also find out what facts the author uses to substantiate his position;
- 4) general presentation and argumentation: as you go deeper into the process of "observational" reading, you need to achieve a deep understanding of the facts used and how harmoniously they fit into the argument; ask about the meaning of unfamiliar words in the dictionary or try to guess their meaning; follow how the author proceeds in the final part, having previously analyzed the last few paragraphs; think about the meaning of the article, about the logic of its construction;
- 5) assessment: after reading the article carefully, it is advisable to determine your attitude to it, whether the reader liked it; whether it was difficult/easy or interesting/boring to read it, try to make some judgments about the article.

Analyzing the article critically and comprehensively, the student needs to logically build the course of his thoughts, based on the following strong points: the purpose of the article, target audience, subject of discussion, reason, main position, facts, style, and presentation of arguments, conclusions, meaning, and impact on the reader.

The presentation of the content implies that ... the student, using language tools and critical thinking skills, demonstrates an understanding of the content of the article and tries to interpret the author's position on the issue under consideration, as well as express agreement / disagreement, approval / disapproval, etc., as well as draw conclusions .

Let us turn to those types of practical activities in the classroom that use newspaper material and are aimed at further developing students' critical thinking skills. They learn how to write reviews of the material they read, and also form a position of leadership in conducting discussions. As examples, we will consider some types of practical exercises.

1. Portfolio creation and record keeping. The essence of this activity is that each student of the group independently chooses articles, which reflects individual interest. Articles must be cut out of newspapers and write a summary with comments. Subsequently, the processed newspaper material is archived and can be used by the teacher in subsequent work.

2. Increasing the level of visual perception

This activity focuses on reading and interpreting newspaper articles. Photographs and graphics are seen as an integral part of the articles, allowing a better understanding of the hidden meaning of the content, which is facilitated by visual literacy. The main strategies used in this type of activity are: visualization, formation of a logical conclusion, preliminary assessment-forecast, history mapping, verification, planning, layout, comparison and comparison, characterization, presentation, questioning, detailed description, search for main ideas. Photos, graphics - unspoken clues, guiding threads leading to an understanding of the content, which are as important as the words from the text. Moreover, visual aids allow give a deeper understanding of the author's ideas. Such activities are carried out before reading the text, when students look at photographs, cartoons, etc., then write down key thoughts. While reading, students formulate questions and try to make assumptions about the further course of events in the article, based on a preliminary assessment of events, using factual data about the place of the event, date, time, era, clothing, facial expressions, age, symbols, lifestyle, relationships between people, etc.

Conclusion

As conclusion, we would like to mention that many teachers and students prefer to choose newspaper rather than book texts as articles are topical, diverse, and easily accessible. Hence, newspaper articles will help to develop not only critical thinking, but also improve the skills of all types of speech activity: speaking, listening, writing, reading during discussions and debates in the classes.

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