On Teaching Strategies in College Oral Teaching Based on Critical Thinking Theory*

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After experiencing several reforms, the college oral English teaching in our country has greatly developed, but it is not yet sufficient enough to focus on the cultivation of students' critical thinking skills. Based on critical thinking theory, this paper points out the misconception of college oral English teaching, discusses the importance and necessity of critical thinking skills in college oral teaching, and puts forward corresponding teaching strategies based on critical thinking theory with the emphasis on the design of different oral activities, thus making sure that the talents equipped with both language skills and critical thinking can be cultivated.

Keywords: teaching strategies, critical thinking skill, oral teaching

How to improve students' critical thinking ability is what educators at home and abroad have been concerning these years. Although more and more colleges tend to cultivate students' critical thinking in foreign language teaching recently, the circumstance of emphasizing grammar and skill while neglecting high-level reasoning and humanism still exists. Therefore, how to improve students' critical thinking has become a big problem for college English teaching. This paper discusses the importance and necessity of critical thinking skills in college oral teaching and puts forward corresponding teaching strategies based on critical thinking theory.

Concept and Connotation of Critical Thinking

As a kind of thinking skill, the concept of critical thinking stems from the West. Dewey, the father of critical thinking, firstly put forward the self-reflection thinking which can be perceived as the embryo of critical thinking. Robert Ennis, the pioneer critical thinking in America thought that critical thinking is the clear and reasoned thinking one person holds based on the objective experience. Richard Paul, the chairman of National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking introduced metacognitive model into critical thinking. He held the opinion that critical thinking is a kind of individual thinking model. People control the inner structure within this thinking model and evaluate thinking in accordance with the knowledge standard, thus improving thinking. Although scholars hold different ideas on critical thinking, most of them agree with what Facione defines in Delphy Report, that is, critical thinking is the process of reasoned and self-control judge, including interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and interpretation to evidence, concept, and standard.

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The research on critical thinking in China starts from 1980s. Under the theoretical frame of critical thinking at home under abroad, WEN Qiu-fang puts forward the model frame of hierarchy theory and proposes that the reasoning ability includes two hierarchies-meta reasoning ability and reasoning ability. Meta reasoning ability, also called self-control ability, is the skill to plan, check, adjust, and assess one's thinking; while reasoning ability includes the emotional feature related with cognition. Aiming at how to cultivate the critical thinking ability in foreign language teaching, the scholars in China put forward different strategies on the basis of curriculum teaching. For example, ZHANG Xin-ling thinks that the way of combining reading and writing can promote the development of critical thinking. YU Guo-liang proposes that the teaching means, like mistakes analysis, cases teaching, and data driving can promote the development of critical thinking in translation teaching. Currently, the researches on critical thinking skills in oral teaching are not as many as the other teachings. WEN Qiu-fang thinks that the oral teaching requires the activities that can challenge students' reasoning ability and help to cultivate their induction and abstraction ability, dialectic logic thinking ability, and creative thinking ability. PENG Qing-long proposes that the activities, like speeches and debates, can be used in class to enhance students' critical thinking ability and creative ability.

Current Situation of College Oral English Teaching

Oral English ability is an important index to judge students' comprehensive ability to master English as well as a vital part of college English teaching. Presently, college students are poor at communication in English and the current situation of college oral English teaching is not hopeful:

Emphasize Exam-Oriented Education While Neglect Oral Skill Training

Under the pressure of CET-4, CET-6, and final tests, college English teachers pay more attention to cultivate students' reading and writing ability, emphasizing the importance of understanding texts and extending reading quantity. Besides, some teachers require students to recite sample papers and write with stereotyped templet. Such a way can help some students pass tests with high score. However, what they have improved is not the comprehensive ability to utilize language but the ability to deal with different exams. Their oral communicative ability and logic thinking ability still needs to be improved.

Emphasize Accuracy and Fluency of Language While Neglect Cultivation of Thinking Habits

College English teachers usually focus on accuracy of language itself and fluency of language expression, disliking the grammatical and phonetic mistakes made by students. While actually, native speakers usually judge the communicative ability of the second language learners on the basis of pragmatic competence, ignoring the phonetic and grammatical mistakes that will not affect meaning communication. However, being influenced by the way of emphasizing language form for a long time, students tend to believe that the right grammar, standard pronunciation, and fluent expression are the standard to judge whether they are good speakers or not. Students will form a stereotyped habit of following teachers' mono-thinking, making it difficult to critically analyze and discuss their own views.

Design Simple Topics and Neglect the Cultivation of Thing Ability

What students learn at English class are mostly interesting stories or popular science articles without difficulties and what they discuss at oral class are usually some questions junior students are interested in. Although these questions are beneficial to train language skills, they are not challengeable for students to improve their critical thinking ability, nor to promote their creative and analytic ability. Students tend to stay at

the superficial level to understand questions, neglecting the ability to think in a deep way. They are poor at communicating systematically and logically, let alone to criticize the others' views and to innovate something new.

Teaching Strategies to Cultivate Critical Thinking in English Oral Teaching

The cultivation of thinking ability should be throughout the entire process of high education. Since this paper focuses on oral teaching, it only discusses how to combine language skill training with critical thinking in oral class.

Logically speaking, language is just a carrier, which expresses some ideas. The organization of ideas should be the next to thinking ability. While the expressed ideas can be either at the junior stage of the formal logic thinking or at the senior stage of the dialectical thinking. That is to say, our teaching activities will either cultivate students' high-level thinking ability or strengthen their low-level thinking ability. Only teachers choose consciously teaching activities can promote students to change their thinking ability from junior stage to senior stage. Here are some suggestions on teaching strategies.

Oral Activities Should Be Designed to Challenge Students' Thinking Ability

It needs to combine speaking with writing or listening in oral class if we want to both train language skill and cultivate thinking ability. It proves that it is hard for students to discuss those questions with deeper meaning without the input of certain language materials. On one hand, students will have trouble in expression, that is to say, they do not know what to say; on the other hand, students will have trouble in language, that is to say, they are lack of vocabularies and sentence patterns that can help to express their own ideas. For one thing, reading and listening can inspire students to open their mouth and express themselves. It will be better if the chosen materials are controversial. For another thing, the chosen reading or listening materials should be served to supply some available language materials and ideas. For example, if we choose an article in defense of smokers, the clarified reasons in it may conflict with what students perceived before and students may have a strong desire to discuss it.

Oral Activities Should Be Designed to Cultivate Induction and Abstraction Ability

Formal logic think includes analytic and synthetic ability, abstraction and induction ability. In accordance with the observation long time, we find that students are poor at induction and abstraction. For example, when students are required to classify different elements and describe them with summarized names, they are usually puzzled by the following two problems: (1) The classification is not at the same level and (2) The classification is sometimes overlapping. Aiming at these problems, we can consciously organize some activities in our teaching. For instance, teachers can ask students to list the disadvantages of smoking/drinking. When students have listed more than 10 after discussion, what teachers do is not to stop discussion but to classify the reasons students have discussed. Similarly, we can discuss many questions in this way. For example, why is the water pollution so serious in China? Why are the female students discriminated at the job-hunting market? What should be noted is that teachers should help students overcome the above problems when discussing these questions.

Oral Activities Should Be Designed to Cultivate Dialectic Thinking Ability

Dialectic logic thinking, the senior stage of thinking emphasizes the flexibility, comprehensiveness, and profundity of thinking. The properly-designed activities in oral class can help students to be able to analyze

questions from different views. For example, we can discuss whether China should encourage people to possess private cars. When discussing, teachers should supply proper guide. For instance, both teachers and students can discuss the perspective of looking at this question, like, the perspective of economic development, the perspective of environment respect, the perspective of life quality improvement. If we can think of this question from three perspectives, we can find that it is hard to answer this question by yes or no. Similarly, we can also discuss how the other developed countries solve this problem from the perspective of historical development, or discuss how the other similar countries solve it from the horizontal perspective.

After the above discussion, students will straighten out ideas and look at this question overall. Although students can also express their views without such a guide, their views may not be overall, lacking of inner logic connection. Similarly, we can discuss whether closed-book exam should be cancelled at college, whether all cigarette factories in China should be closed. After similar training, students can learn by analogy and judge the whole from the part.

Oral Activities Should Be Designed to Cultivate Creative Thinking Ability

The cultivation of creative thinking ability should be throughout the education from primary school to college. Bottom speaking, creative thinking is divergent thinking. We can design specific activities to cultivate creative thinking ability and mix it into the activities designed to cultivate logic or dialectic thinking ability. The following activities can be used to cultivate creative thinking: (1) imagine the situation of high education 20 years later; (2) imagine the scientific invention 20 years later; (3) imagine the fate of TV 20 years later; (4) give own critical views on an article; and (5) supply own solution to a problem. When doing these activities, teachers should emphasize novelty instead of logicity and encourage the different ideas.

In addition, we can ask students to carry out mini-research projects in English. Firstly, teachers can divide students into different groups, then ask each group to choose topic on their own, design investigation plan, collect data, and orally report the research result. Finding out problems is a kind of creative thinking, while analyzing data needs both logic thinking ability and dialectic thinking ability. Therefore, this analog research process is involved in the cultivation of different thinking ability.

Conclusion

Being influenced by the curriculum integration and comprehensiveness advocated by modern high education, critical thinking is gradually blended with another subjects. In college oral teaching, we can introduce inspiring topics, encourage students to take an active part in different activities, thus making the cultivation of the critical thinking throughout the whole process of oral teaching in order to help students improve their creative ability as well as their ability to master English. In such a way can talents needed by society be cultivated.

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