



The Better Ways to Cultivate and Test Students' Critical Thinking in English Reading in Senior High School

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Abstract: The New English Curriculum put four key competences based on the current teaching situation and international trend. Thinking ability is one of the key competences, which play the imperative role in students' learning. Meanwhile, the reading class is one of the best ways to cultivate students' thinking ability, especially the critical thinking. However, the ways to test student's critical thinking are still low and intermediate. There is the clear contradiction between the requirements in the New English Curriculum and current situations. If this problem could be improved or solved, Students' thinking ability can be improved and can also cater to the requirements of the New English Curriculum. This paper will explore how to cultivate and test students' critical thinking.

Keywords: Critical Thinking; Cultivation and Test, Reading Texts

1. The relationship between critical thinking and reading

1.1 The importance of critical thinking

Critical thinking refers to the ability of students to think, analyze and reason. They can think, analyze, reason and judge the reading texts in the process of English learning and using, so as to make reasonable and reflective decisions on the extraction of information and problem solving after speculation. But now, in the process of English learning, students in senior high school don't have the good ways to understand and memorize the teaching contents of their teachers, and they should conduct corresponding thinking and analysis to truly master the core of English knowledge and improve their English learning level. In the process of high school English teaching, teachers should pay close attention to cultivating high school students' English critical thinking.

1.2 The linkages between critical thinking and reading

As we all know, reading passages contain different discourses. For example, the reading passage *The Journey in the Australia*. We can easily judge its theme is human and nature. The main topic is that author takes the train to enjoy the alongside colorful scenery. This discourse is close to students' real life, and has the characteristics of inquiry significance and emotional value, etc. Therefore, students can have logical minds when they read this passage based on the plenty of linked words. In the process of reading the article, students will keep asking questions according to the progress of the trip. In addition, students' ability to be critical could be practiced by the comparison between Chinese landscapes and Australia scenery. Students should be guided to answer various questions which are carefully designed by teachers. Discourse close to life has a certain degree of authenticity, which helps students understand the discourse based on existing knowledge, and creates a critical consciousness when students compare new and old knowledge.

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2. The status quo of cultivating and testing students' critical thinking in English reading

Take the test requirements of college entrance examination for example, New English Curriculum put three levels about critical thinking nowadays. The first level is that students pay attention to observing various phenomena of language and culture, and identify the similarities and differences of various information through comparison and so on. The second level is that students should actively observe various phenomena of language and culture, discover various reasons for differences, and infer the logical relationship formed between them. Next, students should correctly observe various phenomena of language and culture, be able to identify key issues, grasp the overall situation and infer various logical relationships formed between them. However, the assessments to test students' thinking ability still focus on low and intermediate level. Students are supposed to have a clear understanding toward reading passages and they have the ability to summarize the main idea of the reading passage or to guess one word meaning in the context. But we can't see plenty of conjunctions between the questions and critical thinking. The flexibility of students' thinking has not been opened up.

3. The ways to cultivate students' critical thinking

As teachers, while guiding students to form correct values, we must protect their thinking vitality. Some reading themes convey the more popular topics at the moment. For example: scientific articles about human exploration of space. Students will have their own opinions, maybe they will support the exploration of space, maybe they will have the opposite opinion. In short, teachers should encourage students to express their views boldly and flexibly.

3.1 Choose the title

The teacher organizes students to think critically about the title of the article. For example, after the student has read an article, let the student choose a title for the article.

3.2 Debate the controversial views

If the main idea of reading passages involves some controversial views, I mean it is the argument. There is no doubt that the debate could be used to cultivate students' critical thinking. Teachers can randomly divide classmates into positive and negative sides. In the process of preparing for the debate, even if the distribution of pros and cons is not the ideal point of view for students, in order to complete the debate, it is necessary to find arguments that are beneficial to their own side, so that students can learn to think about problems from different aspects.

3.3 Combine the critical thinking with emotional teaching

Teachers cultivate students' critical thinking through emotional teaching. Both English and Chinese are cultural carriers. New English Curriculum put one key concept, that is views on English learning activities. As teachers, we can make good use of various activities and involve students in emotional teaching. For example, in the process of teaching "Festivals Around the World", teachers use multimedia tools to play Western and Eastern festival videos for students, such as Chinese Spring Festival and Western Christmas, so that students can compare different festivals and cultures and express the differences between Chinese and Western cultures. If the teaching could be conducted in various activities, students may get emotional experiences. Meanwhile, students' critical thinking could be improved little by little. While mobilizing students' emotions in the process of English learning, teachers should allow students to establish correct values, expand students' tolerance for the culture of hope, broaden their knowledge of learning, and enhance students' sense of Chinese cultural identity.

4. The ways to test students' critical thinking

Many illustrious experts didn't put effective ways to test students' key competences. But the critical thinking is relatively easy to test. And Logical reasoning ability can also be measured by objective written examinations. In a word, the critical thinking can be tested by a lot of ways. Although critical thinking is the abstract quality, it does not mean that they can't be tested. Next, some concrete examples will be used to illustrate how the critical thinking is measured.

4.1 The multiple-choices

We can see that in high school English reading, the thinking quality, including critical thinking is still tested through multiple choice questions. Take the 2019 college entrance examination English national paper II reading comprehension as an example, the test of critical thinking is embodied in observation and comparison, analysis and inference, induction and construction, criticism and innovation. These four combinations progress from low to high, and finally reach the highest level of innovation. Most of these questions focus on the low level of thinking. Although, there are many points involving students' thinking quality in the examinations, the way to test students is still single, the multiple-choices. It is not denied that multiple-choices play a significant role in the process of testing students' critical thinking.

4.2 Opened-questions

As we can see, students are required to have the abilities of induction and construction, but why can't we take essay questions to examine students in the exam? Take the 2019 college entrance examination English national paper II as an example, "what is the best title for the text?" is the No.35 question of the passage D. We can completely change this title to "If the title of the article is Space: The Final Homework Frontier". Do you agree and why? On the one hand, students will feel that this is not test-oriented education, because they will not be resistant. On the other hand, students could utilize their critical thinking and creative thinking so that they can write their own answers based on their feeling. And this kind of question can be used to test students' comprehensive understanding for the reading passages. But it puts much higher requirements for students. In other words, students must have the ability to produce one sentence. The language ability could also be tested in this process. What's more, we can use a minimal structure in the reading test. The structure of the article used for the assessment is relatively simple. The student is required to answer only one question or explain one thing, such as asking students to express their views on a topic or issue of interest or defend their position. This type of question can give students more space to give comments, but provides less diagnostic information for teachers.

4.3 Multiple-choice and constructed response

Multiple-choice questions and open questions have their own limitations in evaluating critical thinking. In view of the strong comprehensiveness of the question type of choice plus constructed response, it can make up for the insufficiency of multiple choice questions and allow students to have differences in background and interpretation of the topic. Many researchers strongly recommend the use of choice plus constructed response to impose critical thinking topic. For example, the No.25 questions in the college entrance examination (2019III) is What does Hill say about Chinese women? The following answers are: They are setting the fashion, they start many fashion campaigns, they admire super models and they do business all over the world. According to the Multiple-choice plus constructed response, we can add an open question, what do you think of the comparison between Chinese women's fashion and Western woman's fashion? after the multiple choice. It can be seen that multiple-choice questions mainly examine critical thinking skills, and open questions mainly examine critical thinking tendencies.

4.4 Continuation writing after reading

The college entrance examination in Zhejiang Province adopted the continuation writing method, which changed the traditional way of college entrance examination. In fact, the United States has already adopted such a similar test method. Initially, this kind of test requires college students to read and analyze relevant texts to make a critical response. Now the critical thinking of students evaluated by performance evaluation has been extended to the American middle school students. Continuation writing has significant meaning. In addition, reading and writing can promote the improvement of learners' writing ability, and it has a positive effect on learners' internalization of language knowledge, rationalization of ideas, and use of imagination to create writing content.

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